



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

ANDOVER-HARVARD LIBRARY

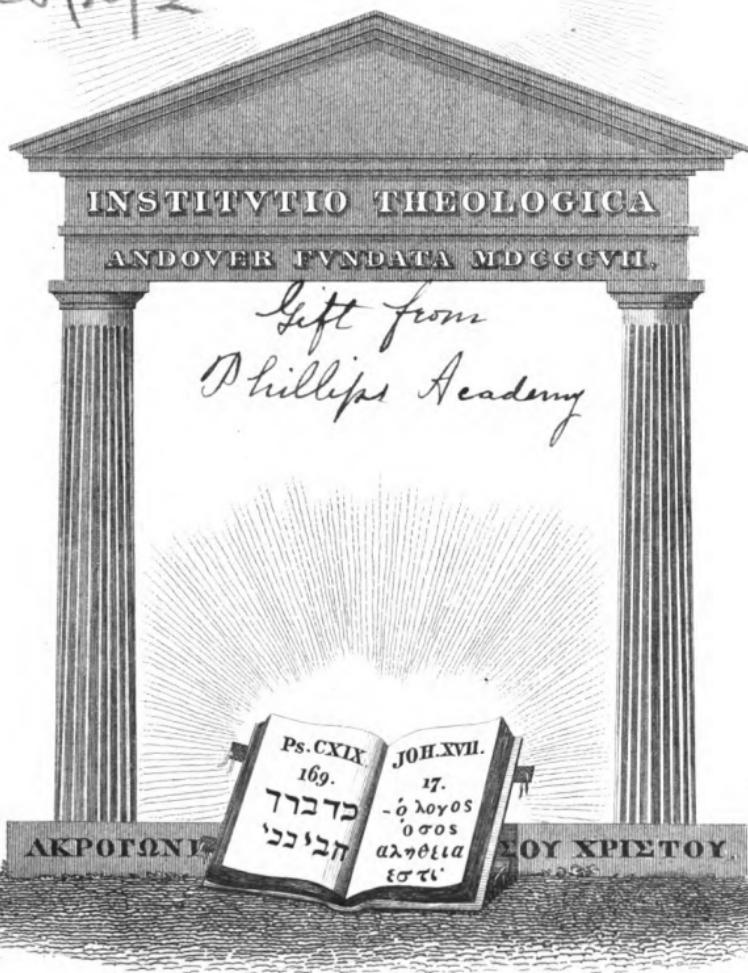


AH 4HGB T

Harvard Depository  
Brittle Book

copy 2  
1829

יהוה











J. A. Thompson.

**RATIO DISCIPLINE,**

OR THE

**CONSTITUTION**

OF THE

**CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.**

---

**PORLTAND:**

---

**PUBLISHED BY SHIRLEY AND HYDE.**

---

**1829.**

**DISTRICT OF MAINE, TO WIT:**

**DISTRICT CLERK'S OFFICE.**

**B**E IT REMEMBERED, That on the tenth day of April, A. D. 1829, and in the fifty-fourth year of the Independence of the United States of America, Mr. Thomas C. Upham, of said District has deposited in this office, the title of a book, the right whereof he claims as proprietor, in the words following, *to wit*:

Ratio Disciplinae, or the Constitution of the Congregational Churches. Portland, published by Shirley & Hyde, 1829.

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled "An Act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;" and also to an act, entitled "An Act supplementary to an act, entitled An Act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned; and for extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints."

J. MUSSEY, Clerk of the District of Maine.

A true copy as of record,

Attest,

J. MUSSEY, Clerk D. C. of Maine.

ANDOVER THEOL. SEMINARY

MAR 5 1907

- LIBRARY. -

58755

718.  
Co  
U672  
1829  
copy 2

#### PREFACE.

There is an account of the Order and Government of the Reformed churches of Bohemia, written by Commenius, and which bears the title of **RATIO DISCIPLINE FRATRUM BOHEMORUM**. In imitation of that work, the treatise of the celebrated Cotton Mather, on the Government and Order of the Congregational churches, is entitled **RATIO DISCIPLINE FRATRUM NOV-ANGLORUM**. As this treatise of Mather has ever been the subject of frequent reference and of great authority, it was thought advisable to retain the name of **Ratio Disciplinæ**, although the literal import of the words falls short of the extent of subjects, embraced in the present work.

A concise treatise on Congregational Order and Faith has been long needed. The subject, in its full extent, is not embraced in any one ancient work, but must be gathered from all. Those works are scarce; are written in an antiquated style; and are perplexed with propositions and discussions, which have never been sanctioned by the Usage of the churches. The writer has endeavoured to extract from them, according to the best of his judgment, the admitted principles and order of the sect; hoping, that what has been written, may be of some service to the cause of religion, notwithstanding its defects. It would have been greatly pleasing to him, if some other person had made the attempt; but he had been taught, both by his own experience and by the testimony of others, that the subject had already been neglected too long. A sense of duty, therefore, led him to the undertaking, although it was engaged in with reluctance; and he now, with sincere desires for their welfare, submits it to the candour of the churches.

THOMAS C. UPHAM.

Bowdoin College, (Maine,) April, 1829.

## CONTENTS.

### CHAPTER I.

#### ORIGIN OF CHURCHES.

- § 1. General nature of a church,
- 2. Reasons tending to the introduction of a church state,
- 3. Light of nature in reference to this subject,
- 4. Of an objection sometimes made,
- 5. Of man as a religious being,
- 6. Of man as a social being,
- 7. Social religious worship deduced from the light of nature,
- 8. Of the need of Revelation,
- 9. Authority, &c. for a church state in the New Testament,
- 10. General internal constitution of a church,
- 11. Characteristics of a true church,
- 12. Concluding remarks, &c.

### CHAPTER II.

#### CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.

- § 13. Of the visible and invisible church,
- 14. No immutable form prescribed to the visible church,
- 15. Varieties of form and sects,
- 16. Foundation or authorities of the Congregational system,
- 17. Fundamental principles of the Congregationalists,
- 18. Remarks on the preceding general principles,
- 19. Facts on the origin of Congregational churches,
- 20. Of the name, Independents, sometimes given,
- 21. Origin and Import of the name, Congregationalists,
- 22. Views of Congregationalists in respect to the primitive churches,
- 23. Of the churches immediately after the Apostolic age.

### CHAPTER III.

#### GATHERING OF CHURCHES.

- § 24. Duty of Christians to enter into a church state,
- 25. Qualifications of church members,
- 26. Testimonies of Congregational writers on this subject,
- 27. Numbers requisite for a church gathering,
- 28. Of articles of belief,
- 29. Of the covenant and grounds of the same,
- 30. Covenants authorized by scripture,

## CONTENTS.

v

31. Sentiments of the Primitive and of foreign churches,
32. Method of Proceeding ; day of Prayer, &c.
33. Assistance from the neighboring churches,  
*NOTE.* Form of a letter missive,
34. Of the public religious exercises,
35. Forms of church articles and covenants.

## CHAPTER IV.

### CHURCH OFFICERS.

- § 36. Need of officers in the Church shown from the light of nature,  
*NOTE.* Writings, &c. of Mr. John Cotton,
37. Church officers recognized in the scriptures,
38. Number of officers in Congregational churches. Ruling Elders,
39. Further remarks on the office of Ruling Elders,
40. Office of Deacons,
41. Duties of Deacons,
42. Further remarks on the duties of Deacons,
43. Induction of Deacons into office,
44. Office of Minister or Pastor,
45. Distinction of Ministers or Elders into Teaching or Pastoral,
46. Duties of a Minister,  
*Note.* On the mode of Preaching,
47. Duties of a Pastor further considered,
48. Of committees of laymen for religious purposes,
49. Duties of the brotherhood.

## CHAPTER V.

### ADMISSION OF MEMBERS.

- § 50. Of the character of those who are to be admitted,
51. Claims or right of such to admission,
52. Statements of personal religious experience,
53. Grounds or reasons of the foregoing practice,
54. Examination of persons coming from other churches,
55. Of admissions in reference to the right of voting,
56. Propounding and the concluding ceremony of admitting.

## CHAPTER VI.

### CHOICE AND CALL OF A PASTOR.

- § 57. Of the internal or personal call of a minister,
58. External call or call from the church,
59. Church precedence in the call of a pastor, and grounds of it,
60. The precedence of the church in the pastoral call a Natural Right,
61. Founded also on scripture authority and example,
62. Necessary to the maintenance of purity in the ministry,
63. The church has no coercive power over the Parish,

64. Grounds of the reference of the choice to the Parish or Society,
65. The concurrent action of the two a matter of agreement,
66. Of the support of the minister,
67. Form of the call or invitation.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ORDINATION OF THE PASTOR.

- § 68. Of the necessity and authority of ordination,
69. Of the meaning and comparative importance of ordination,
  70. Remarks on the early practice of the churches,
  71. Ordaining councils the representatives of the churches,  
NOTE. Form of Letter Missive,
  72. Reasons for calling the neighboring churches to the Council,
  73. Of the admission of lay-members or delegates sent,
  74. Preparatory proceedings of the Council,
  75. Further proceedings of the Council,
  76. Ordaining Prayer,
  77. Import of the imposition of hands,
  78. Of the object and manner of the Charge,
  79. Of giving the Right Hand of Fellowship,
  80. Spirit of the Hand of Fellowship and closing services,
  81. Installation of a minister,
  82. Accountability of delegates and ministers to the churches,
  83. Of the members of a Council substituting others in their stead,
  84. Of inviting others to sit as members, who are not chosen by the churches.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ORDINATION OF MISSIONARIES.

- § 85. Occasions and need of Missionary ordination,
86. Of ordaining for distant churches at the invitation of the same,
  87. Ordination of Missionaries to the heathen,
  88. Certain early instances of missionary ordination,
  89. This practice a security to the heathen themselves,
  90. Its consistency with the church's right of election,
  91. Historical facts illustrative of the practice,
  92. Formation of the Council,
  93. Council's proceedings and Religious exercises.

## CHAPTER IX.

### OF CHURCH CENSURES AND EXCOMMUNICATION

- § 94. Design or object of church censures.
95. Of suspension and excommunication when the offence is private,

96. Punishment of public and known offences,  
 NOTE. On the duty of pastors in respect to public  
 scandals,
97. Of the proper spirit or temper in dealing with offenders,
98. Treatment and right of the excommunicate,
99. Restoration of the offender on repentance,
100. Of immediate separation from corrupt or scandalous  
 churches,
101. Of refusing to attend the sacrament with scandalous  
 persons,
102. Form of suspension, from Mather's Discipline,
103. Form of excommunication, from the same.

## CHAPTER X.

### TRANSFERENCE OF RELATIONSHIP.

- § 104. Nature and obligation of the church covenant,
105. The church to be consulted in cases of proposed re-  
 moval,
106. Of sinful and of doubtful cases of departure,
107. Just or sufficient reasons of removal,
108. Persons dismissed are to receive Letters of Dismissal,
109. Of letters of recommendation without dismissing.

## CHAPTER XI.

### PASTORAL ASSOCIATIONS.

- § 110. Origin of pastoral associations,
111. Objects of pastoral associations,
112. General or State associations,
113. Objects and religious exercises of General associations,
114. Relation of clerical associations to the rights of the  
 churches.

## CHAPTER XII.

### OF LICENSING TO PREACH.

- § 115. Early views of the churches in respect to preachers,
116. Imperfect arrangements on this subject,
117. Associations authorized to license preachers,
118. Of the examination previous to licensing,
119. Length of time for which licenses are granted,
120. Form of the license,
121. Of annulling or revoking licenses,

## CHAPTER XIII.

### REMOVAL OF MINISTERS.

- § 122. Early Congregational views of ministerial removals,
123. Treatises or authorities on this subject,

- 124. 1st class of cases, justifying a minister's removal;
- 125. 2d class of cases, authorizing removal,
- 126. Other occasions, authorising a minister's departure,
- 127. Advice of a Council necessary in the removal of a minister,
- 128. Testimonies in favor of the preceding principle,
- 129. Of the calling, and the nature of the Council,
- 130. Proceedings of the Dismissing Council,
- 131. Recommendation of pastors regularly dismissed.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### DISCIPLINING AND DEPOSING OF A MINISTER.

- § 132. Of the necessity of some means of disciplining ministers,
- 133. The minister amenable to his church,
- 134. Evidence of such accountability from the scriptures,  
NOTE. On the practice of the primitive churches,
- 135. Methods or process of disciplining a minister,
- 136. Further considerations on this subject,
- 137. Advice of Council in the discipline of a pastor,
- 138. Proceedings and results of the Council,
- 139. Of the testimony adduced against a pastor,
- 140. Of the deposed minister's relation to the church,
- 141. Subordinate means of pastoral discipline,
- 142. Duty of neighboring churches in the case of neglecting discipline,
- 143. Further proceedings of such churches in the above case.

## CHAPTER XV.

### COUNCILS.

- § 144. Acts of communion according to the Synod of 1662,
- 145. Of the obligation of churches to seek advice,
- 146. Of the persons composing Councils,
- 147. Ancient testimonies on this subject,
- 148. Of those who have the right of calling Councils,
- 149. Obligation of the churches to regard Letters Missive,
- 150. Of the feelings with which Councils should be summoned,
- 151. Principles on which Councils are to decide,
- 152. Of the weight due to the Advice of Councils,
- 153. Advice of Councils in matters merely prudential,
- 154. Advice in matters of Conscience.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### MUTUAL COUNCILS.

- § 155. Occasions of calling mutual councils,
- 156. Practice in selecting the council and letter missive,
- 157. Mutual councils representative of all the churches;
- 158. Mutual councils are ultimate tribunals,

- 159. Consociated or permanent mutual councils,
- 160. Of the authority or powers of consociations,
- 161. Historical remarks on consociations,
- 162. Objections to permanent or consociated councils,
- 163. Objections to councils, which are not permanent,
- 164. Of the progress and improvement of the Congregational system.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### EX-PARTE COUNCILS.

- § 165. Of the nature of Ex-part Councils,
- 166. Circumstances that warrant an aggrieved person or persons in calling an Ex-part council,
- 167. Duty of the churches, summoned to an Ex-part council,
- 168. An Ex-part allowable only on the refusal of a Mutual council,
- 169. Proceedings of Ex-parts councils,
- 170. Further proceedings of the same,
- 171. Proceedings of the Ex-part council in relation to the church,
- 172. Object and necessity of Ex-part councils,
- 173. The necessity of them superseded by consociations.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### SYNODS.

- § 174. Nature of synods and scripture grounds of the same,
- 175. Powers and authority of synods,
- 176. Of the members of synods and the calling of the same,
- 177. Historical notices of synods,
- NOTE: On the authorship of the Cambridge Platform,
- 178. Synodical decisions persuasive or advisory.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### DISCIPLINE OF WHOLE CHURCHES.

- § 179. Congregational churches may discipline each other,
- 180. Method of discipline laid down in the Platform,
- 181. Treatment of unoffending members in a corrupt church.

## CHAPTER XX.

### BAPTISM:

- § 182. Significancy and subjects of baptism,
- 183. Method of proceeding at baptisms,
- 184. Mode of applying water in baptism,
- 185. Administration of adult baptism,
- 186. Relation of adult baptism to church membership,
- 187. Of the agent or administrator in baptism,

- 188. Of the right of a minister to baptize abroad,
- 189. Administration of baptism in private,
- 190. Infant baptism,
- 191. Relation of baptized children to the church,
- 192. Of the baptism of adopted children,
- 193. Duties of particular churches to their baptized children.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### HALF-WAY COVENANT.

- § 194. Members and engagements entered into,
- 195. Origin of the practice of half-way covenanting,
- 196. Further remarks on the same subject,
- 197. Early opposition to the system of half-way covenanting,
- 198. Doings of the synod of 1662 on this subject,
- 199. Views of the objectors to the synod's articles,
- 200. Prevalence, results, and abandonment of the system.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE LORD'S SUPPER.

- § 201. Origin and permanency of the Lord's supper,
- 202. Qualifications of those to be admitted,
- 203. Admission to the eucharist, compared with admission to baptism,
- 204. Mode of administering the Lord's supper,
- 205. Right of a pastor to administer it in other churches,
- 206. Frequency of this ordinance,
- 207. Duty of the church to those who refuse to attend the Lord's supper from private prejudices,
- 208. This sacrament administered to members of other sects.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### CHURCH CONFERENCES.

- § 209. Of Conferences as compared with other religious bodies,
- 210. Objects of Church Conferences,
- 211. Early views of Congregationalists on Conferences,
- 212. Cotton's plan or proposition for conferences,
- 213. Recent attempts to establish Conferences,
- 214. Of the permanent regulations or constitutions of Conferences,
- 215. Method of organizing Conferences,
- 216. Meetings and religious exercises.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### WORSHIP AND RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS.

- § 217. No time sacred but the Sabbath,
- 218. Form and ceremonies of worship,

- 219. Of places of worship and dedications of the same,
  - 220. Custom in respect to ministerial exchanges,
  - 221. Days of fasting and prayer, and of thanksgiving,
  - 222. Of private religious meetings,
  - 223. Of the custom of renewing covenant,
  - 224. Form of the renewal of covenant.
- 

## PART SECOND.

### CONFESION OF FAITH.

- CHAPTER I.** Of the holy Scripture,  
**II.** Of God and of the Holy Trinity.  
**III.** Of God's Eternal Decree,  
**IV.** Of Creation,  
**V.** Of Providence,  
**VI.** Of the fall of man, of sin, and of the punishment thereof,  
**VII.** Of God's covenant with man,  
**VIII.** Of Christ the Mediator,  
**IX.** Of Free-Will,  
**X.** Of Effectual Calling,  
**XI.** Of Justification,  
**XII.** Of Adoption,  
**XIII.** Of Sanctification,  
**XIV.** Of Saving Faith,  
**XV.** Of Repentance unto life and salvation,  
**XVI.** Of Good Works,  
**XVII.** Of the Perseverance of the Saints,  
**XVIII.** Of the Assurance of grace and salvation,  
**XIX.** Of the Law of God,  
**XX.** Of the Gospel and of the extent of the grace thereof,  
**XXI.** Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience,  
**XXII.** Of Religious Worship, and of the Sabbath Day,  
**XXIII.** Of lawful oaths and vows,  
**XXIV.** Of the Civil Magistrate,  
**XXV.** Of Marriage,  
**XXVI.** Of the Church,  
**XXVII.** Of the Communion of Saints,  
**XXVIII.** Of the Sacraments,  
**XXIX.** Of Baptism,  
**XXX.** Of the Lord's Supper,  
**XXXI.** Of the state of man after death, and of the resurrection  
             of the dead,  
**XXXII.** Of the Last Judgment.

## APPENDIX.

- ART: I.** Congregational and Presbyterian Heads of Agreement,  
**II.** Saybrook Articles,  
**III.** Legal Rights of Churches and Parishes.

**CONSTITUTION  
OF THE  
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.**

**Part First.**

**CHURCH ORDER AND GOVERNMENT,**

**DEDUCED FROM**

**PLATFORMS, THE ACTS OF ASSOCIATIONS, COUNCILS, AND  
SYNODS, THE WRITINGS OF THE CONGREGATIONAL  
FATHERS, AND USAGE.**

## CHAPTER FIRST.

# ORIGIN OF CHURCHES.

### §. 1. *Of the general nature of a Church.*

SOMETHING more than two centuries ago, there came into being in Old England a brotherhood of Christian assemblies, who early assumed to themselves, and have borne the name of THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES. After various vicissitudes and removals, in the expectation of a less restricted exercise of their religious rights, many of this sect in the course of a few years planted themselves in North America, where they have grown up, and have sent out numerous and goodly branches.

It is the object of this **RATIO DISCIPLINÆ** to give some account of the Principles and Practices of these favored Churches; it being important, now that we are spread abroad over the land, and are perhaps too apt to forget our small beginnings, to maintain an acquaintance at least with the ecclesiastical doctrines of our revered forefathers, which are the great bonds and preservers of our association and name. This is the object, particularly had in view.

But before we are prepared to enter into the consideration of the Church state, as modified by the principles of a sect, it seems suitable to say something of its general nature; it being remembered, however, that our

work is essentially Historical, and that it is the intention of the writer, even if he should sometimes have the appearance of speaking in his own name, to act merely as the scribe and interpreter of his fathers and brethren, the Congregationalists. When, therefore, we look at the general nature of a Church, without inquiring particularly into its interior and specific organization, it is perhaps sufficient to say of it, that a Church, (that is, a particular Church,) is a company of professed believers, associated together for the worship of God, for the observance of Christian ordinances, and for mutual help and edification in religious things. The minute and precise inquiries, which are hereafter to be entered into, in unfolding the Constitution of Congregationalism, will help to explain and define these more general expressions on this subject.

#### §. 2. *Reasons tending to the introduction of the Church state.*

It is natural to inquire, when we see a number of persons, united together with particular objects in view, as to the grounds or reasons of that union. And if it be not only natural, but important in other cases, we may well conclude, it is not less so in the present. The acts, which are performed in a Church state, such as the worship of God, the celebration of Christian ordinances, mutual instruction and watchfulness and intercessions, are certainly of no small consequence. We say, then, in answer to the inquiry, relative to the union of men for these desirable and precious purposes, that the grounds or reasons of a Church state, are of a two-fold nature; being deducible in part, in the first place, from the light of nature, and, in the second, more fully from the revealed will of God or the Scriptures.

*§. 3. The light of nature in reference to this subject.*

Although we are greatly favored in the enjoyment of biblical instruction, yet there are undoubtedly many things, in which we are left to the dictates of common sense and experience; and we are to understand by the light of nature itself, no other than the indications of the common reason, the common sense of mankind. Congregationalists strenuously contend, that we ought to be scrupulous in our adherence to the Scriptures, so far as any information can be obtained from that source, in respect to ecclesiastical concerns; but it has, nevertheless, been a prevailing opinion among them, even from the days of their founders, that in some cases we may safely rest on the decisions of our natural understandings. Accordingly in the Cambridge Platform, which was first adopted in 1648, and is one of the most authentic, if not the earliest document recourse can be had to, we find reference expressly made to equity, the law of nature, and common reason. *See Chap. XI. on the Maintenance of Church officers.*

On the 10th of September 1679, the Platform was unanimously, for the substance of it, re-approved and accepted by a Synod of the Churches in the Colony of Massachusetts, held at Boston. And again, at a period not long subsequent to that Synod, we find in certain PROPOSITIONS, published by an assembly of ministers at Cambridge, and growing out of the Platform, the following expressions, having relation to the subject of this section, "Particular churches, having the same original ends and interests, and being mutually concerned in the good and evil of each other, there is the LIGHT OF NATURE as well as of Scripture, to direct the meeting of Churches by their delegates, to consult and conclude things of common concernment unto them."

That there may be a correct and satisfactory under-

standing on this important point, we quote also some passages from the approved and learned work of Mr. Samuel Mather, entitled *An Apology for the Liberties of the Churches in New-England*. The extracts are from the prefatory Discourse concerning Congregational Churches.—“We think indeed, (says Mather,) that there are some circumstances, relating to the worship of God and the government in these churches, which, agreeable to what is practised in other societies, may be regulated by NATURAL LIGHT and CHRISTIAN PRUDENCE according to the general rules of God’s word, which ought forever to have a particular regard paid unto them.”—And again in a subsequent part of the same Discourse, “I have observed already concerning some circumstances in the worship of God and the government of particular churches, that natural light and christian prudence, according to the general rules of God’s word, may regulate them. And, therefore, it seems to arise from a captious and quarrelsome humor, when any cry out upon us, Where are your positive commands, produce your express institution for this practice and the other custom in your churches, for in such things the LIGHT OF NATURE is sufficient to direct and guide us.”\*

In sentiments of this kind, Congregationalists agree with many distinguished and worthy writers of other denominations of Christians. Says Richard Heoker, the famous author of Ecclesiastical Polity, (Book I. sect. 8,) “The general and perpetual voice of men, (that is, the general and prevailing sentiment of mankind,) is as the

---

\* The work of Mr. Mather, (son of Cotton Mather,) was printed in 1738. It exhibits a great acquaintance with the subject of Congregationalism, and we shall have frequent occasion to refer to it. In the work of Mr. John Wise, pastor of a church in Ipswich, printed in 1772, we have a confirmation of the statements of this section in the very title page, which reads thus; A Vindication of the Government of New England Churches, drawn from Antiquity, the Light of nature, Holy Scripture, and from the Dignity divine Providence has put upon it, &c. See Wise’s work, chapters I. and II. of his Second Demonstration.

sentence of God himself; for that, which all men have at times learned, nature herself must needs have taught, and God being the author of nature, her voice is but his instrument. By her, from Him, we receive whatsoever in such sort we learn. Infinite duties there are, the goodness whereof is by this rule sufficiently manifested, although we had no other warrant besides to approve them."

But there is still higher authority, that of the Apostle Paul, who evidently defends the doctrine of natural judgments of right and wrong in that remarkable passage, (Rom. chap. II. 14, 15,) "*For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves, which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another.*"

And in addition to this passage, we find the Apostle frequently referring to the light of nature in proof of what he himself delivers, as in the 9th chapter of 1st Corinthians, where he refers, in support of the doctrine, that the labors of the minister ought to be compensated, to the common judgments and practice of mankind; to the shepherd, whom all men consider entitled to a share in the milk of the flock, and to the vine dresser, who rightly participates in the fruits of the vineyard. There is also a similar course of reasoning on the subjects introduced at chap. XI. 3—16, and chap. XIV. 33—40; that is to say, an appeal is evidently made to the common sentiments of mankind as to what is according to nature, decent, orderly, and proper.

#### §. 4. *Of an objection sometimes made.*

It should be remarked, however, that objections have, from time to time, been made to these views. Of these,

the one most insisted on, and the only one perhaps necessary to be specified here, is involved in the following passage of Scripture;

Rom. xiv. 23, "And he that doubteth, is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith, *for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*" The objection, founded on this passage, is particularly mentioned in the work of Richard Hooker above named, (Book II. sect. 4.;) and in such a way as to lead us to suppose, that it was much insisted on in his time by certain Dissenters from the Church of England, and probably by some Congregationalists.—The argument seems to be this; Whatever is not of faith is sin; but faith, as the term is more commonly used, has reference to the declarations of the Word of God; therefore, whatever is not done according to the express precepts of the Scriptures, is sin; and the inference, drawn from these positions, was, that in all matters of a Church or ecclesiastical nature, we are not at liberty to act without an express Scripture warrant.

But let us now briefly consider the nature and applicability of this objection.—The principle, involved in the passage, when taken in connection with the related passages and properly interpreted, seems to be this; that, in doubtful cases, if our faith or belief, founded on the declarations of Scripture, lead us to a particular course of conduct, we are in duty bound to pursue that course, rather than the opposite or a different course. If, for instance, taking the very case which the Apostle is particularly remarking upon, a person deems it a scriptural injunction to refrain from the eating of meats under certain circumstances, it is incumbent on him so to do, although his views of the meaning of the Scriptures may be erroneous. On the other hand, if a person seriously considers the Scriptures as authorizing him to eat meats,

he is at liberty to eat ; the conduct of the individuals in either case being regulated by their faith or belief. This is the doctrine in the case particularly had in view by the Apostle ; and we may suppose also in certain other cases of an analogous nature. And accordingly supposing ourselves to be at liberty to extend the principle to the subject under consideration, the result will be, if a person believe, or be persuaded, that certain obligatory principles and practices relative to Church Government, be declared in the Scriptures, it is his duty to adopt and follow them, although others may have different views of the Scriptural declarations. The statement, therefore, that **WHATEVER IS NOT OF FAITH, IS SIN**, does not necessarily imply, that we can do nothing but what is expressly laid down in the Scriptures. It merely expresses this ; That whatever we conceive to be laid down in the Scriptures, according to our careful and conscientious interpretation of them, ought to be binding upon us. But we are still left at liberty in those cases, which we do not consider to be decided upon by the Scriptures, to govern ourselves by the best dictates of our unassisted judgment or reason ; and also where the Scriptures are very express, we may rightfully aim to confirm and illustrate its precepts by an appeal to the natural understanding ; making it a serious study, as it is an interesting and important one, to examine into the nature of man as a religious and social being, and thence deducing rules of duty and of government.\*

---

\* Although we have thus laid it down, as an established principle of Congregationalists, that we may consult the light of nature in some cases even in ecclesiastical matters, still it should be noted, that various remarks are to be found in the documents, relative to our Church polity, which, taken by themselves, would not seem to sustain this view. The Cambridge Platform itself is exceedingly strict, in binding the Churches to a consultation of the Divine Word, and in limiting mere human discretion. But the doctrine, above laid down, is not founded on an insulated passage merely, which perhaps some other insulated passage might perplex and render doubtful ; on the contrary it is gathered from the whole history of the Congregational fraternity, and is given as the sense of the Churches in general, although different notions may have prevailed in the minds of some individuals, and even have enjoyed a temporary ascendancy at some particular periods. In a few words the doctrine is this.

*§. 5. Of man as a religious being.*

The alleged views, relative to the authority of the dictates of the light of nature on ecclesiastical subjects, would be less creditable perhaps to the worthy fathers of the Congregational system, if man were not a religious being; that is to say, endowed with capacities for the worship and service of the Deity, and placed in a situation, rendering such service and worship a duty. The history of the world, and the sentiments of the most esteemed writers in all ages of mankind, show, that he is such. Heathen nations, who have never been favored with the Old Testament and with Christian instructions, have, nevertheless, evinced, by their worship of the heavenly luminaries, and of woods, fountains, and animals, that man, although he may have erred as to the proper object of worship, still was designed to worship something; that worship, that the reverence of some higher existence, that religion is essential to his nature. Many uninspired writers of great note in civilized and Christian lands, as Des Cartes and Locke,\* looking at the question independently of the Scriptures, have agreed in considering the idea of God, either as innate in the human mind and connatural with it, or as certainly and clearly discoverable by the legitimate exercise of its powers. The very first lines of the Congregational **CONFES-  
SION OF FAITH** of 1680, fully authorized no doubt in the opinion of the writers by the Scriptures themselves, ex-

---

that in many things of an ecclesiastical nature, especially such as are of leading concernment, we are encouraged to look to the Scriptures for express directions, but in some other cases, where God has not seen fit to give such express directions, he has left us to the guidance of our natural judgments. This is believed to be truly and emphatically the sentiment of the Churches at the present day.—See, (in addition to Mather already quoted,) the work of an earlier and very able writer, Dr. John Owen, entitled, *An Enquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order, and Communion of Evangelical Churches*, Chap. 1. Sec. 6, Chap. II. Sec. 1.

\* *Des Cartes' Principia*, Pt. I. §§. 13, 14; *Locke's Essay*, Bk. I. Ch. iv. II. Ch. xxiii.

pressly declare, that "the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable." And this is warranted by the Bible. "*The invisible things of Him, (says the Apostle, Rom. 1: 20,) from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse.*"

Now if it be true, that man is a religious being, and that such is his character as taught by the light of nature independently of the Scriptures, then the same natural reason would lead us to expect, that he would put forth all the acts befitting, and corresponding to such a character. And accordingly we see him fulfilling the sacred offices of worship in the solitary place, such as may suit his convenience or the mood of his mind; perhaps in the desert, perhaps in the hidden cavern, or in the retirement and shades of the forest. But it was a saying of one of the wise Ancients; "Man is not born for himself alone."

#### §. 6. *Of man as a social being.*

And hence we are to consider man, not only as a religious, but as a social being. Man is not created in solitude, but in society. When he first opens his eyes on the wonderful things of the world, he beholds those, who bear the same image with himself. From the beginning he is borne in the arms; is cradled on the bosom; and hears the sweet accents of his fellow creatures. As he grows up from the period of infancy, he clearly discovers the social propensity of his nature. When children are old enough to go out into the woods, to range the pastures, and to plunge into the waters, we find them happy and rejoicing, when together, but in general, discontented and sullen when alone. And when again we

behold men, in the maturity of life, gathering themselves in cities; when, as in some periods of history, we see them leaving in vast hordes their native land, seeking out more auspicious settlements; when we witness them congregated in great empires and acting for the most part in vast united bodies both in peace and in war, is there any longer room to doubt, that men are made for society, that the love of society is natural to them, that it is an ultimate propensity of their constitution?

*§. 7. Of social religious worship as deduced from the light of nature.*

Now if man be a social being, this law of sociability will show itself in religious feeling and action, as well as in multitudes of other things. If men, obeying the tendencies of their nature, meet together in legislative halls for civil and political deliberations, is it not equally agreeable to their nature and to common sense and reason, that they should assemble, in like manner, in as deep, and solicitous consideration on their religious concerns? If there be in men certain principles, which ensure the union of their persons and the concentration of their efforts in the pursuit of wealth, power, and empire, then certainly the most unfavorable views of human nature will not deny, that there are in men principles, which will induce them, in some degree at least, to bring together their purposes and feelings in the worship of the Most High. If man be naturally in some sense a religious being, looking upward to some Supreme Intelligence to support his weakness and to guide his ignorance; and if he be also a social being, then sociability and religious feeling must come together; and while we are permitted to worship, under the solitary tree of the forest or alone beneath the open canopy of heaven or wherever we may choose, we

shall also worship with our neighbor, calling together our kindred, assembling in one conjoined and beautiful act of homage those of different ages and sexes, the cheerful simplicity of youth, and the severe wisdom of age.

"Without the worship of God in SOCIETIES, (says the venerable Owen,) there would be an absolute failure of one principal end of the creation of man; nor would any glory arise unto God from the constitution of his nature, so fitted for society, as that it cannot act its own powers without it." *Owen's Enquiry into the Original, &c. of Churches, chap. I. sect. 6.*—Congregationalists, therefore, regard it as a dictate of our nature, of our intellectual and moral constitution, and as such fully discovered by the feelings and practice of the great body of mankind in all ages, that it is suitable and incumbent on men to perform at times acts of worship in company. And accordingly it follows, that we may in part look for the foundation of Churches or of a church state in human reason, or what may be otherwise called the light of nature, since social worship is allowedly an important condition and object of such a state.

### §. 8. *Of the need of Revelation.*

Although in the language of the worthy writer referred to in the last section,\* "The power and necessity of act-

---

\* The very learned and pious Dr. Owen, justly reckoned one of the guides and fathers of the Congregational churches, was born in 1616, at Haddam, in Oxfordshire, England. He was educated at Queen's College, Oxford, which he left in 1637. In 1643, he went to Coggeshall and gathered a church on Congregational, or what were then commonly called, Independent principles; his adherence to which he had previously made known. He once expected to remove to this country, and settle in New England, but was prevented for some cause. He was abundant in labours, and of ardent piety. He wrote many books; one in particular, having relation to the subject of this work, entitled, *An Enquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order, and Communion of Evangelical Churches.*—This work was not published until after the author's death, which took place at London, 1683.—There is also an anonymous work, first printed in 1687, and attributed to Dr. Owen, entitled, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God and Discipline of the Churches of the New Testament, &c.*

ing together is given unto our nature for this end principally, that we may thus glorify God, in and by the worship, which he requires of us ;" a statement, which implies, that without such conjoined and associated worship, we should act against the highest end of that nature ; still we are to consider it a great happiness, that God has not left us to the light of reason alone. One part of a church state is associated worship, and so far reason may be our guide, for nothing is more reasonable than such worship ; and in the course of these inquiries, we shall find it satisfactory, in other respects also, to rest upon its intimations ; but it is freely conceded, that human reason, however clearly it might have indicated the propriety of an association of worshippers, could never of itself have laid the foundations of a *Christian* church.

The light of nature alone never could have disclosed the aggravation and the extent of sin ; the light of nature never could have fully and satisfactorily declared the dreadful danger, attendant upon all sin unrepented of ; from this source alone we could never have become acquainted with the divine character and mission of Jesus Christ, and with the symbolical sacraments of the Supper and of Baptism. Even the church of the Old Testament was visited with hopes, and was charged with duties, and was subjected to arrangements, which implied the controlling interposition of a Divine Revelation ; and much more then the church of the New Testament, "For God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." On the subject of the Evangelical church state, as well as on others of a more personal nature, although we are not required to renounce our reason, we are seriously required to resort to it, as those, "who have the sure word of prophecy, to which they do well to take heed as unto a light, shining in a dark place."

*§. 9. Authority and directions for a Church state in the New Testament.*

Guided then by the sure instructions of the Holy Word, let us attempt to examine the New Testament, and to consider what has resulted from the coming of Christ in reference to the subject before us. And in entering into this inquiry, it must be considered exceedingly obvious, that the Saviour's Advent has laid mankind under new obligations ; and especially so, those, who have received Christ in the character of Redeemer, and have reason to regard themselves as his followers, for they are under Christ in a peculiar sense, and are not at liberty to consider themselves their own. "None of us liveth, (saith the Apostle, Rom. xiv. 7, 9,) to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord ; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living."—Christ then being acknowledged in general to be the ruler of his people, we are to inquire more particularly both as to what rights he possesses, and as to what duties he has enjoined. And (1) he has the right to direct his people and to require their obedience, derived to a certain extent from, and as a consequent on the blessings he has conferred.—Christ is spoken of, (John I. 9,) in reference to the instructions, of which he is the author, as the " true light, which lighteth every man, that cometh into the world." The Apostle Paul, in allusion to their redemption from sin, repeatedly says of Christians, they are " bought with a price ;" and also in another form of expression, but of similar import, he speaks of them, as " purchased by the blood of Christ."—But it cannot be considered necessary to dwell at any length here on the blessings, of which Christ is the

source to his beloved people. They are very clearly and amply disclosed in the annals of his holy and perfect life ; in the story of his incarnation, of his toils and sufferings, of his agony in the garden and on the cross, of his ascension and his intercessions in the presence of the Most High.

And on the general principle, that the bestowment of benefits creates and authorizes in the bestower a peculiar interest in the recipient, it is an obvious inference, that Christ, who has done so much for his people, has acquired rights in the direction and government of them, founded on his unexampled love.

(2) But on looking a little further into the New Testament Scriptures, we cannot fail to discover, that express and ample powers are conferred on the Saviour in these respects ; that they are not merely constructive, but direct.—Of old, God said unto the Saviour, more than he said at any time to the angels, “ Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” God appointed him “ heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.” And again, God hath “ given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many, as God hath given him.” “ Giving thanks (says the apostle) unto the Father, who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear son ;” “ Who hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the Church.”\* So that Christ, by the ordination of God, is the giver of everlasting life, the king of saints, the head over all to the Church or for the good of the Church, and the heir of all things ; and being such, he evidently possesses authority, in virtue of this divine ordination, to constitute a Church state, with such ends and according

\*Heb. I. 2, 13, John 17 : 2, Coloss. 1 : 12, 13. Eph. 1 : 22.

to such order, as shall seem suitable. He is not only the redeemer, but the ruler of his people ; not only the son, but the heir, not only the purchaser, but the bestower of everlasting life, having, in the language of the apostle to the Colossians, " in all things the pre-eminence ;" and therefore, it is right and becoming, that all his followers should look to him with humility as their law-giver ; knowing, that the Shepherd, who has shown such infinite kindness to his flock, will order nothing but in great wisdom and mercy.

And accordingly Christ, in the exercise of the power vested in him, hath, either directly of himself, or indirectly by the teachings of the apostles, left instructions to these ends, that God is to be worshipped, which we learn also from the light of nature and from the Old Testament Scriptures ; that it is incumbent on men to worship him in company, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together, which is also agreeable to the light of nature and likewise to the instructions of the Old Testament ; that it is the duty of men to be baptized, a symbol of the needed purification of the heart ; that it is their duty to partake of bread and wine in remembrance of his crucifixion and atonement ; that they are to renounce the selfish pursuit of the things of the world and to live together as brethren, in the exercise of mutual sympathy, love, and kindness. And thus he has in great mercy laid down the distinctive, the holy, and excellent principles of a church state, essentially differing from what could have been suggested by the mere light of nature ; differing in certain obvious respects from that imperfect antediluvian church state, which seems to have bound together in certain peculiarities of belief, hope, and practice, those who " called themselves by the name of the Lord ;" differing also in a very

marked manner from the ancient Jewish Church ; which has already been recognized in all parts of the world, and shall continue, as long as time lasts, a source of great consolation and blessedness. And it must, therefore, be considered the duty of all Christians, founded on reason and on the explicit injunctions of their exalted and blessed Redeemer, to associate together for worship, for the maintenance of the ordinances of Baptism and the Eucharist, and for the enjoyment of mutual instruction and prayer, and such other religious and brotherly offices, as are indicated in the word of God.

#### §. 10. *Of the general internal constitution of a church.*

But it remains to be inquired further, How this ecclesiastical union of his followers, which the Redeemer was authorized to appoint and require, is to be sustained and perpetuated ? And it might be answered in general terms, that it is to be done *by the love of Christ* ; for he hath said of his disciples, "Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the world," Matt. 28 : 20. But then it ought to be remembered, that the love of Christ, like the agency of God, acts by means, and in concert with the established principles of our nature. Look then, for a further illustration of the general nature of the Christian Church at that instructive declaration of the Apostle, (Eph. 2 : 19—22,) whom we are bound to consider as speaking the mind of Christ ; *Now therefore ye are no more strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*"

In this passage, we have obviously these general views ; (1) Christ himself is the head of the Church ; the beginning, the foundation, the chief corner-stone, without whom it does not, and cannot exist. And this agrees with what has been shown more at length in the preceding section.—(2) It is further very clearly implied in this passage that there is an analogy between the Church as remodelled and completed in the New Testament, and households and cities ; a truth, which lets us at once into its internal constitution. For the light of nature teaches us, as all will allow, that, in households or families, there must be imperative regulations or laws ; and that there must be both government and subordination. It is the same in cities ; there must be a magistracy, laws, and obedience ; it being impossible, that cities, or other civil communities, or corporations of any kind, should exist without them. Hence the constitution of a Christian Church implies not only the association together of individuals for express purposes, but also that Christ's house, which is only another name for such ecclesiastical association, has its principles of government and action, its laws and officers, not less than families and civil communities. Christ is the founder and lawgiver ; and in the exercise of his character as such, he requires of the members of his household, the citizens of his New Jerusalem, the recognition and observance of such laws, as are suitable and necessary ; whether we gather them from the light of nature, from the covenants and church state of the Old Testament, from the example and the epistles of the Apostles, or from his own holy example and instructions.—And here comes the answer to the question at the head of the section, viz. That the Church under Christ is to be sustained and perpetuated by its covenants, principles, and laws ; by the due appointment of officers, and the subor-

dination of members, and the conscientious discharge of duties in all stations ; in a word, by enabling the holy principle of evangelical life to grow up, and flourish, and multiply through the medium of an authorized and appropriate organization.

### §. 11. *Of the characteristics of a true Church.*

In view of what has been said, it will perhaps not be difficult to indicate some, (not professing to go into a minute examination of the subject,) of the general characteristics of a true Church state ; such as naturally and necessarily flow out from its very nature, from its origin, its design, and tendencies ; and are not dependant on the name that is borne, nor necessarily involved in the minor, and non-essential arrangements of outward organization.—(1) It must, in the first place, be deemed an admitted and fixed principle with all persons, *that every true church adopts the doctrines of the Word of God.* The church, as we have had ample occasion to see, is founded on Christ as its head and chief corner stone ; but Christ assures us, he came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil. The Word of God, therefore, (not a part, but the whole,) the Law, the Prophets, and the Apostles must furnish its Creed ; Christ himself, as in matters of mere form and discipline, being the foundation. It is said at the close of the Apocalypse, if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this Prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life, and out of the holy city. And the spirit of this denunciation undoubtedly embraces associations, as well as individuals ; leaving no man and no body of men at liberty to take from, annul, or alter, either directly or indirectly, the doctrines of the Divine Word.

(2) A second mark of a true Church, is *the mainten-*

*nance of discipline, and of religious instruction.* In respect to the article of discipline, it must be sufficiently obvious, that no Church can be regarded as a true Church, unless it sets itself strictly and effectually against all persons outwardly vicious, such as drunkards, swearers, blasphemers, and sabbath-breakers, and also against all others, who are not found to sustain such a character, as may justly be expected of a professed follower of Christ. "Ye are a chosen generation, (says the Apostle Peter, I. Ep. 2 : 9,) a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people."— And also the neglect of the suitable and appointed means of religious instruction will not less imply forfeiture of the character of a true Christian Church. This position is equally obvious with what has been stated in respect to matters of discipline; inasmuch as all allow one great object of the union of believers in a church state to be mutual support and edification. "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another even as also ye do;" Thess. I. Ep. 5 : 11. "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done to edifying;" Cor. I. Ep. 14 : 26.

Let it be noticed, however, although there be a distinction between a true and a false Church, every communion of Churches, or in other words, every religious sect must judge for itself as to this thing. All religious communities have the Bible before them, the code of the eternal God; and they are at liberty, and it is their duty to interpret it rightly, and to apply the results, at which they arrive, to their own state and conduct, and that of others. But the right is reciprocal, and all other religious bodies possess it equally. The day, when one religious sect could bind its interpretations of scripture upon another, however candidly made, except in the way of friendly

advice, persuasion, and admonition, is passed; and happily, both for the peace of the world, and the advancement of the cause of Christ, that of religious freedom is begun.

### § 12. *Concluding Remarks, &c.*

We indulge the conviction, that we have now arrived at the true sources of a Church-state, especially of an Evangelical Church-state, including not only the author and objects, but the methods of its perpetuation; at least, we have not failed to give the sentiments of Congregationalists in reference thereto, as written in their ancient books, and as disclosed in various ways from one generation to another. And we may safely take it upon ourselves to say, that the principles, at the foundation of our ecclesiastical structure, were carefully examined by men of great experience and prudence, and also of undoubted learning, especially in the Scriptures. The venerable wisdom of John Cotton, and the logical acuteness of Mr. Hooker of Hartford, stood side by side, and shoulder to shoulder, with the learning and sagacity of Robinson and Owen; not to mention many other renowned names, that had a share in framing its goodly proportions. And we may confidently aver of such an edifice, erected with great labour, sanctified by prayer, and now rendered venerable by age, that it is not to be lightly esteemed, still less wantonly abandoned. But it becomes us, as in the days of Jeremiah, “*To stand in the way, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and we shall find rest for our souls.*”

## CHAPTER SECOND.

### CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.

#### §. 13. *Distinction between the visible and invisible church.*

It seems suitable here, to allude very briefly to the distinction, which has sometimes been made between the Visible and Invisible Church.—(1) The word **CHURCH**, when qualified by the epithet **INVISIBLE**, includes the whole body of the faithful; to whatever land they belong, and to whatever Christian sect they attach themselves. Whoever truly possesses the elements of Christian character, is a member of the Invisible Church; and as such possession is neither restricted by party names, nor circumscribed by geographical boundaries, it may confidently be assumed, that the limits of Christ's unseen household are known only to God, the searcher of hearts.

(2) The Visible church is any number of persons, who give credible evidence of Christian character, by professedly and apparently endeavoring to walk in the way of the divine commandments, having associated themselves together according to authorized church order, and with the objects in view, recognized in such order.—So that invisibility, when the term is applied to the Church state, has reference to the existence of the Christian principle merely; while visibility relates to its outward manifestation, or what is supposed to be such manifestation.

*§. 14. The Scriptures have not prescribed to the visible Church an immutable form.*

The question, Whether the Scriptures have declared a complete form of church organization, exact and unchangeable in every particular, has in part already been anticipated, in the remarks of the first chapter, relative to the light of nature. “To refuse the conduct of the light of nature, (says St. Augustine, in accordance with what has been shown to be the sentiment of Congregationalists,) is not folly alone, but is attended with impiety.”\* But if, together with the general principles, every particular of discipline and worship, (we say nothing here of doctrine,) were expressly and minutely given, the words of Revelation would of course be authoritative and exclusive; and the agency and dictates of reason would be thrown out. Now we grant without hesitation, that the Scriptures are sufficient to guide us in respect to every thing essential; and that we ought humbly and thankfully to follow such directions as are explicitly laid down in them, whatever the nature of the subject they relate to. And on the other hand, it is no less evident, that human reason and authority may interpose in those cases, where the Scriptures are silent; subject, however, to the limitation of those general and essential principles, which are acknowledged to be declared in them. And hence under the conduct of the reason of things, it is lawful for the followers of Christ to introduce such regulations for the due support and order of the church, as are deemed by them to be proper and necessary, but are not already expressly instituted. And this on the general ground, that the form of the Visible Church is in some respects not fixed and immutable.

---

\* Lumen naturalis dictatum repellere, non modo statum est, sed et impium;  
August. lib. 4. de Trin. 1. cap. 6.

§. 15. *Of varieties of form in the visible church and of Sects.*

And hence it follows, as might be expected, that well-meaning Christians often entertain differences of opinion, especially on matters of minor importance ; and thus become divided into different sects. Times, and modes, and ceremonies of worship, and certain processes in discipline, may appear suitable to some, which do not equally suit the situation, habits, or views of others. Although the Christian world profess to be brethren, we find them, from these causes, divided into parties, and bearing different names, such as *Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Moravians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, &c.* pursuing one great object, it is to be hoped, but in different ways.

None of these various sects, so far as is known, is destitute of an authorized, and settled CONSTITUTION ; each of them embodying what it conceives to be the sense of Scripture in certain articles of faith, and adopting certain modes of worship and discipline, which the individual members are in general not at liberty to disregard. Among the names, into which the Church, in the providence of God and no doubt for wise purposes, is divided, the Congregationalists hold a respectable place, whether we consider their number or principles ; and it is to them, that our attention must be in great part directed.

§. 16. *Of the foundation or authorities of the Congregational System.*

Congregationalists have adopted their Ecclesiastical Constitution, in the first place, on the general ground, that it is the birthright of all men to govern themselves under God, both in politics and religion, and that they

possess no less authority than others, to think and to decide for themselves on these matters. And in the second place, having adopted it, they still hold it forth as a rule for themselves and their descendants, in consequence of a long and serious conviction of its reasonableness, of its beneficial tendency, and of its conformity to the Scriptures.

But a question arises, What is the Congregational Constitution? And the obvious answer is, The opinions, that have been expressed in respect to ecclesiastical matters, and the practices, which have been followed by the members of that communion for about two hundred years.— And if the question be again asked, How are these opinions and practices to be ascertained? The no less obvious answer is, From ancient Congregational writers on the subject, from the Platform of 1648, and the collateral discussions, from the more recent Platform adopted by the Congregational Churches of Connecticut, and from general usage. And thus ascertained, we flatter ourselves, it will be found as judiciously constructed, as harmoniously balanced, and as agreeable to reason and the Bible, as any other system whatever.

We are not ignorant that, it has been alledged in various quarters that the Congregationalists have no church constitution, no distinct articles of faith, no common bond of union, or common principle of action. But such declarations, to say the least, have been unadvisedly made, and are without good foundation.

#### §. 17. *Certain early and fundamental principles of the Congregationalists.*

In looking back into things, as they were in the beginning, we discover, that there are certain general congregational principles, which were in part avowed by

them, as early as the age of Mr. Robinson, who has been rightly deemed the founder of the sect, and of the celebrated church at Leyden in Holland, of which he was the pastor. As in the course of these discussions it may prove convenient for various reasons to have these general principles stated together, (or at least some of the more important of them,) they here follow. ♦

(1) Men being by nature possessed of a capacity to govern themselves, and having a right so to do, any competent number of persons, sincerely professing themselves to be guided by Christian principles, are at liberty, and have the right to follow the suggestions of reason, conscience, and the Scriptures in respect thereto, and to form themselves into a distinct church.

(2) Every Church of Christ rightly consists only of such as appear to believe in, and obey him; and no others are to be considered suitable materials to be introduced into it, either at its formation, or in subsequent admissions.

(3) The union or incorporation of persons into a Church-state is made by means of a mutual agreement, a contract or covenant, either express or implied.

(4) Every Church in the first instance, and subsequently every agreeing community or brotherhood of Churches, (that is to say every religious sect,) has a right to declare what it considers to be the will of Christ in regard to the terms of communion and the general principles of Church order; and also to insist on the fulfilment of this will, as thus understood by them; and this cannot justly be considered, and is not an infringement on the rights of others.

(5) No particular Church, including those non-professors, who ordinarily worship with them, (that is, no Church and society,) ought to consist of more members than can conveniently meet together for worship.

(6) Those, who are united together in a church state, have a right to choose their own officers ; and if, for prudential reasons, this right in respect to the pastor, be shared with the non-professors or Parish, so called, the participation of power in this respect must, nevertheless, be so arranged, as to render inadmissible and unauthorized any choice, made without, or against the consent of the Church.

(7) The permanent officers of a Church are MINISTERS, otherwise called Pastors, and DEACONS.

(8) Pastors, being chosen according to instituted order, and ordained, have no power to rule the church, but by consent of the brethren ; in other words, the power of discipline is essentially in the members of the church as a body, and not in its officers.

(9) All churches are equal in respect to ecclesiastical power and privileges ; all ministers are equal ; and the same with all the brethren.

(10) Churches, although they originally possess in themselves a constituting and preserving power, and are all on an equal footing, are, nevertheless, not independent ; but on the contrary sustain a mutual relationship and interest, and are bound to watch over each other.

(11) Ecclesiastical discipline is wholly spiritual ; being addressed exclusively to the moral and religious character and relations of the subject of it ; rejecting the accompaniment of temporal penalties and the aid of the civil power.

(12) Baptism may be administered to all adult believers, and also to infants and young children, whose parents have been admitted to the Lord's Supper, or at least one of them.

(13) The Sabbath is the only day, which is set apart as holy and to be kept sacred ; in the Scriptures ; but

churches and congregations are at liberty to set apart days of fasting, thanksgiving, and prayer.

See Belknap's American Biography, Art. Robinson; Trumbull's History of Connecticut, chs. xiii, xix.; Hooker's Survey of the Sum of Church Discipline; Bogue's and Bennet's History of the Dissenters, vol. I. ch. 1; the Introduction to Cotton Mather's Ratio Disciplinae; Bartlet's Model of the Primitive Congregational Way, chaps. ii. v. &c.

### § 18. *Remarks on the preceding general principles.*

Some of the above general principles will hereafter be considered with some minuteness, and with particular reference to the authorities and reasonings, on which they rest. Even on a slight examination, they will be found to be fundamental, and to embody the elements of a full system.

It will be a matter of some interest to know, that nearly all of them, (at least for their substance,) were distinctly adopted by the church at Leyden, and are, therefore, to be considered as having been approved by the candid and discriminating mind of Robinson, enlightened, as we have reason to believe, by the Spirit of God and the Holy Scriptures. And in these respects we are ready to suppose, he may have seen further than those eminent reformers Luther and Calvin, whom he imagined to have stopped short of a perfect reformation, and not to have seen all things.—It ought to be remarked, however, that in one respect the Leyden church, (**CLARUM ET VENERABILE NOMEN,**) has not been followed, viz: in including among the authorized, scripture church officers, what have been termed Ruling Elders; a sentiment, which has long since been abandoned by general

consent. Nor does it appear, that the distinction between Church and congregation was so clearly drawn, nor the practices, flowing from the distinction, so fully recognized, as in a few years later.

#### § 19. *Facts relative to the origin of Congregational Churches.*

The principle, that individuals have a right under certain circumstances to form themselves into a church-state, to appoint officers according to the mind of Christ, as revealed in the Scriptures and by the light of nature, and that a church, thus constituted, has in itself a principle of preservation and of church power, and is truly an authorized household of Christ, was understood and admitted by some few persons in England, as early as 1580. And on this fundamental principle a number of churches were gathered; but as the founders of them did not arrive at other principles equally liberal and important, they do not, at this period, seem entitled to be considered Congregational Churches. In the year 1602, a church was gathered on the confines of the counties of York, Nottingham, and Lincoln in England, which chose two ministers, Mr. Richard Clifton and Mr. John Robinson. In the year 1608, the families, composing this church, with Mr. Robinson for their teacher and leader in religious things, set sail for Holland. They spent one year in Amsterdam, and then emigrated to Leyden, where they remained together eleven years. In 1620 a part of them left for New-England. Preparatory to their leaving in July of that year, a day of prayer was observed by Mr. Robinson's Congregation, on which occasion that venerable man preached from Ezra viii. 21, "*Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might*

*afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us and for our little ones, and for all our substance."*

On the 21st of July, that part of the Congregation, who were about to sail for America, departed from Leyden for Delft Haven. On the 22d, Mr. Robinson, being on board of the vessel, bent upon his knees, and commended them, in an ardent and affectionate prayer, to God. He did not sail with them, but returned to the remaining part of the Congregation. He never came to America, as he intended, but died at Leyden, on the 22d of February, 1625; a man "pious and studious of the truth; largely accomplished with gifts and qualifications, and suitable to be a shepherd over the flock of Christ."

From this pious and well informed man Congregationalists generally date their rise. Among other acceptable testimonies in favor of the ecclesiastical principles and the faith of himself and his associates, he wrote a work in Latin, entitled, *APOLOGIA PRO EXULIBUS ANGLIS, QUI BROWNISTAE VULGO APPELLANTUR*, published at Leyden in 1619.

#### §. 20. *Of the name, Independents, sometimes given to Congregationalists.*

In the early periods of their history, as a separate sect, the Congregationalists, as they are now commonly termed, were more frequently known by the name of Independents. The origin of this last-mentioned name is said to have been owing to certain expressions found, in Mr. Robinson's Apology, (*APOLOGIA PRO EXULIBUS ANGLIS, &c.,*) where he asserts, "Every particular society is a complete Church; and, as far as regards other Churches, immediately and INDEPENDENTLY under Christ

alone." No doubt Mr. Robinson, at an early period of his life, entertained views, approaching strict independency; but the general account is, that after going to Holland and having opportunities of conversation with the learned Dr. William Ames,\* he was led to abandon those sentiments. So that when he asserts the Independency of particular Churches on each other, he is undoubtedly to be understood to mean, that one Church cannot be authoritatively controlled by another, and this is precisely the doctrine, which has been firmly maintained by Congregationalists since his time, although it has often been strangely misunderstood or misrepresented. The opinion, which has been held to, is, that particular Churches are independent of each other so far as this, that no other Church or body of Churches can enforce its opinions upon it by means of bonds, penalties, imprisonments, or bodily inflictions. If one Church can control another, by means of its superior knowledge of the Scriptures, by the illustrious excellence of its example, by moral means and not by force, there is no objection. This is the independency, which was undoubtedly meant to be asserted by Robinson, and which is claimed by Congregationalists at the present day, and no other; for no Churches more unanimously and zealously maintain that there is a heavenly bond of union, a golden chain, which binds together not only the Churches of Christ,

---

\* Dr. Ames was a native of Norfolk in England, and was educated at Christ's College in Cambridge. Having left his native country on account of the unpopularity of the sentiments, which he maintained, he afterwards settled as a professor, in the University, of Franeker in Holland. He was the author, among many other esteemed productions, of a book called *MEDULLA THEOLOGIAE*; a work of considerable note. He is frequently mentioned by the early writers in New-England, who wrote on the subject of Congregationalism. He died 1658, aged 57.

but the individual followers of Christ. In particular is it necessary, that the Churches of the same communion, following the same discipline, and professing the same views as to the true doctrines of Scripture, should hold intercourse, should meet together for worship, for mutual instruction, and for consultation, relative to the extension and peace of the City of Zion ; and this is a principle so very important, and it is so necessary to avoid all mistake in relation to it, that the Congregational Churches, especially those of America, have ever decidedly rejected the name of Independents, and have consented to be known by that only, which is now commonly applied to them.

The name of Independents is particularly mentioned in the Platform of 1648, and objected to. And the very first words, in the **RATIO DISCIPLINAE FRATRUM Nov-ANGLO-RUM**, being an attestation in favour of the same by the venerable Dr. Increase Mather, are these ; “ That the Churches of New-England have been originally of the **CONGREGATIONAL** persuasion and profession, is known to every one. Their Platform does expressly disclaim the name of Independent.” And again more recently, it is stated at the commencement of Mr. Samuel Mather’s Discourse concerning Congregational Churches, “ The Churches of New-England are nominally and professedly Congregational. They do not approve the name of **INDEPENDENT**, and are abhorrent from such principles of Independence as would keep them from giving an account of their matters to their brethren of neighboring Societies, regularly demanding it of them.”—See also on this point Bartlet’s **Primitive Congregational Way**, chs. I, II.

§. 21. *Origin and import of the name Congregationalism.*

The name, Congregationalists, like that of Independent, has reference to one of the principles of those who

bear it, but is thought not to be equally liable to be misunderstood. The principle referred to, is, that each congregation, assembly, or brotherhood of professing christians, meeting together for religious purposes in one place, is a complete Church. Such a Church may be connected in various acts of communion with other Churches; but, notwithstanding, it is a Church of itself, and not by virtue of this connection; receiving from Christ the right to appoint its own officers, to discharge the duties of worship, to observe the instituted Sacraments, and to exercise discipline upon its own members.

Furthermore, these particular Churches are the true source of the instituting and advisory power, which is from time to time exercised in Councils, Conferences, and Synods. Although such assemblies are oftentimes imposing, on account of the number, wisdom and piety of their members, they are nothing more than particular churches virtually met together for the common good, by means of a delegation of select persons. As all the members of particular Churches are unable, from the nature of the case itself, to meet together in such assemblies, they have necessarily been led to adopt the method of holding them by means of delegates, either brethren or pastors, or both, as circumstances may seem to render suitable and requisite. This circumstance, that particular congregations of Christians are considered complete Churches, and are the true source under Christ, of the ecclesiastical authority, which from time to time has been exercised in large delegated assemblies, has undoubtedly, and by admission of those most interested to know correctly, given rise to the name of Congregationalists; a name, which, it is hardly too much to say, will remain beloved and venerable, so long as those who bear it, maintain the principles and do the works of their fathers.

*§. 22. Views of the Congregationalists in respect to  
the primitive Churches.*

While the Congregationalists consider their views, in relation to the point, which gives them their name, agreeable to the reason and nature of things, they deem themselves supported in them by the Scriptures. The word, **ECCLESIA**, they say, which is rendered Church, has in the New Testament but two meanings, and these are related to each other. One is, when it denotes a number of people actually assembled together, or accustomed to assemble; admitting, when it has this meaning, of being rendered by the English words convention, meeting, crowd, assembly, congregation, &c. When used in the other sense, it denotes a body of people, not necessarily cohabiting or assembled together in one place, but united by some common tie. The word **ECCLESIA**, which, it should be remarked, is the singular form of the noun, is not known to be used in any intermediate sense, between a single Congregation of some kind, and the whole Christian community. As illustrative of the first named meaning, see Matt. xviii. 17; Acts vii. 38, viii. 1, ix. 31; 1 Cor. i. 2; 1 Thess. i. 1; Coloss. iv. 16; Gal. i. 2; Rev. i. 4, 11, 20. Of passages which may be referred to the second meaning, instances are, Matt. xvi. 18; 1 Cor. x. 32, vi. 4, xi. 22, xii. 28; Eph. i. 22, iii. 10, 21; v. 23, 25, 29; Coloss. i. 18, 24; 1 Tim. iii. 15; Heb. xii. 23, &c. There are undoubtedly shades, or slight differences of meaning in the use of the term, in the passages referred to; but they may all be naturally classed with one of the two general significations, which have been mentioned.

Now under the first general signification, we find the word **ECCLESIA** to mean, not only a meeting, or assembly on some civil or popular occasion, but also a select body

of religious persons, associated and assembling for religious purposes. Accordingly we read of the Church in Jerusalem, of the Church in Corinth, of the Church of Ephesus, of Cenchrea, of Sardis, and the like ; which, as far as we can learn respecting them, appear, like the Congregational Churches of the present day, to have been distinct bodies, associated for religious ends, and in convenient numbers for such an object, acting in the choice of officers, administering the sacraments, admitting and excluding members, and doing other acts, incident to a church state. And hence it was natural, that the Church in Cenchrea, which was a port of Corinth, and of course very near, should be distinct from the Church in the city. And agreeably to this view of the primitive churches, we can readily understand the import of certain passages in the Apostle ; for instance, when writing to the Christian brethren of Colosse, he says, " Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you," Coloss. iv. 12; intimating thereby, that the religious people of Colosse were a distinct body, and knew their own members. And again, writing to the Corinthians, and insisting on the expulsion from their society of one guilty of a great transgression, he says, " Do not ye judge them, that are within ?" 1 Cor. v. 12 ; expressions, which clearly imply their right to discipline their own members. This right of particular churches to exercise acts of discipline within themselves, and which of course involves their distinct and authorized existence as Churches, Congregationalists suppose to be expressly admitted in Matthew, 18th chapter, 15—17 ver. ; where, in case of one brother's trespassing against another, the latter is required to tell the transgressor his fault in private, and then, under certain circumstances, he is to tell it to the church, &c.

Furthermore, they consider the evidence, relative to

this subject, strengthened, when we take into view, that the Churches, spoken of in the New Testament, are sometimes described, as being assembled together in one place, particularly on the first day of the week. See Acts i. 14, 15, xiv. 27, xx. 7; 1 Cor. xiv. 23. And this meeting together is not only for acts of ordinary religious communion and worship, but for any acts whatever, pertaining to Church organization and order, as the choice of officers, &c. See Acts i. 15, 26, vi. 3; 2 Cor. viii. 19. With these passages and others of a like tendency is to be reckoned Acts xiv. 28, inasmuch as the original evidently conveys a different import from the translation. The translation reads *ordained*, but the original, it is to be noticed, is *cheirotonesantes*. So that the passage should be rendered, "They appointed elders or ministers in every church by the lifting up of hands;" that is, no doubt, of the people, who may be supposed to have made use of that very common sign of assent or dissent.

In accordance with the doctrine, that particular bodies of Christians, united for ecclesiastical purposes, are true Churches, we find the word **ECCLESIA**, when meant to apply to the whole body of believers in a particular province or country, used in the plural number, and not in the singular. We read of the Churches of Galatia, Macedonia, Asia, Judea, Galilee, Samaria, Syria, and Cilicia; a phraseology, which evidently implies, that there were in those countries many distinct and separate Churches, as is contended for. See Gal. 1: 2; 1st Cor. 16: 1; 2d Cor. 8: 1; 1st Thess. 2: 14; Acts 9: 31, 15: 41, &c. And this doctrine seems particularly agreeable to the account given in the Scriptures, that the primitive Churches were gathered by means of preaching Christ; and of course that some were affected, and brought in, and not all; forming a peculiar people, a generation to the praise and

glory of God amid a world lying in wickedness. Hence Congregationalists conceive themselves fully warranted by the Scriptures, in maintaining that a number of Christians, duly organized to that end, may constitute a true Church of Christ, possessing the power of self-preservation and government under the direction of the great Head of all Churches and to His glory ; such being the primitive and Apostolical model.

§. 23. *Of the Churches immediately after the Apostolic age.*

In addition to the above argument from the Scriptures, Congregationalists deduce a collateral one from the early periods of ecclesiastical history ; that is to say, the ages immediately successive to that of the Apostles. They refer in particular to the Epistles of Clement and Polycarp ; which are asserted to contain statements irreconcilable with any other views, than those, which have been given. This argument, for which reference is to be made to other treatises is handled at some length in Dr. Owen's INQUIRY INTO THE ORIGINAL, NATURE, &c. OF CHURCHES, at Chap. V., which expressly relates to the State of the first Churches after the Apostles to the end of the 2d century.

The proposition which he asserts, and which he maintains with his accustomed learning is, "That in no approved writer for the space of two hundred years after Christ, is there any mention made of any other organisal, visibly professing Church, but that only, which is PAROCHIAL OR CONGREGATIONAL."—See also, for some remarks on this subject, Samuel Mather's Discourse concerning the Nature, Antiquity, &c. of Congregational Churches.

See in the back S 103

### CHAPTER THIRD.

#### GATHERING OF CHURCHES.

##### § 24. *Duty of Christians to enter into a Church State.*

We next proceed to consider the principles, circumstances, and methods, according to which Christ's people are gathered out of the world into a Church state. And as opening the way thereto, it seems suitable, in the first place, to consider the duty of Christians, or the obligation resting upon them, to enter into such a state.

(1) And this obligation obviously results, first of all, from the fact, that Christ has required the discharge of the duty in question. The mere circumstance that the Saviour himself, while here on the earth, gathered a church, implies, that he makes this requisition on his followers even of the present day. His disciples formed a select body with the Saviour for their head; being united together for particular religious purposes, and by means of an implied, if not an express covenant. In the presence of this beloved community, he partook of the Passover, and instituted the sacrament of the Supper, which has ever since been the distinguishing badge of the church. "*And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, this is my body, which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me.*"

If this were the only passage, which could be found, relative to this duty, it would not be easy to see, how the servants of Christ could excuse themselves from entering into a church state. But we have already had occasion (§ 9.) to speak of the benefits he has conferred on his

people, of the direct and eminent authority he possesses over them, of the commands, either directly or indirectly given by him, for social worship, baptism, and brotherly communion.—And there are other considerations, obviously tending to the same end.

(2) The duty of Christians, to unite together as a church, may be considered as resulting, furthermore, from the nature of the Christian life.—The Christian life is a new, separate, and peculiar life; born of the Spirit of God, baptized into the principles of heaven, and at war with the life of the world. “For this cause, (says the Apostle, Eph. 3: 14, 15,) I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” The family of the Saviour in heaven, and his family on earth are one; of whom equally Christ is the head, and whose name they all bear. But inasmuch as the Spirit of heaven is far from being the spirit of the world, it is incumbent on the followers of Christ to come out, and be separated from the world; and the very idea of such a separation from the world, as shall be an obvious and beneficial one, implies a coming together, an union among themselves.

(3) Again; it is the duty of Christians to enter into a church relationship, because it will prove in various ways beneficial to themselves.—Among other benefits, which may be expected to be secured, it will improve their religious gifts. The value of religious, as well as of mental graces, becomes, no doubt, enhanced by exercise. The opportunity, therefore, of improving by exercise in this respect, which is afforded by frequent assemblies together and prayers, by religious consultations and addresses, must be considered no small privilege, and consequently one, which is not to be disregarded,

And then the entrance into a church relationship is a privilege also, on the ground, that it promotes mutual safety and comfort; checking the risings of sin, and quelling the eruptions of sorrow, and strengthening the fervors of hope, by means of reciprocal watchfulness, admonition, and instruction.

And it is by no means among the least and most unimportant of the considerations, which may be advanced, that, by means of the church relationship, Christ is glorified. In the lips of his people, when met together in this holy Christian fellowship, "his name is great;" "he is greatly feared and reverenced;" "his noble acts are declared and his praise set forth." Happy in a common love, a common hope, and a common leader, they with "one mind and one mouth glorify God." And now if it be a duty in Christians to glorify God and the Saviour, to improve their religious gifts and to promote their religious well-being, in other respects; if it be a duty to act in accordance with the natural tendencies of the Christian life, and, in a word, to obey the undoubted requisitions of Christ, then it obviously appears to be their duty to unite together in churches.

#### *§. 25. Of the qualifications of Church Members.*

It has already been laid down, (§.17) as one of the fundamental principles of the Congregational system, that every Church of Christ rightly consists only of such as appear to believe in, and obey him, and no others are to be considered suitable materials, to be introduced into it, either at its formation, or in subsequent admissions. From the days of Robinson, Hooker, and Owen, no principle has been more fully asserted, more abundantly defended, or strenuously adhered to, than this. Every

writer of acknowledged authority on the subject of Congregational principles has, either directly or by implication, admitted its correctness, notwithstanding there have been strong efforts on the part of the professedly unregenerate to break within the pale of Christ's household. And it is to this day the unanimous voice of the Churches, if this principle were abandoned, there would be nothing worth contending for. At one time, it is true, there was a strong party in Connecticut, who exerted themselves to obtain an open communion, a free admission for all; and this as early as the year 1656, when God was pleased to bless our country with a goodly share of uncorrupted religion. But this party, it is well known, was made up in a good measure of those, who were not professors of religion. They were dissatisfied at being excluded, and wished for a new order of things, particularly the removal of those restrictions, which kept out those who did not give satisfactory evidence of a change of heart, from full Church fellowship. But the proposal was met on the part of the great body both of ministers and brethren, with a stern and uncompromising opposition, as something originating in a purely worldly spirit, unsanctioned by the word of God, and of a perverse and dangerous tendency.\*

Essentially the same plan was subsequently brought forward about the year 1700; and under circumstances, calculated to secure to it a more favorable reception. A worthy minister of North-Hampton in Massachusetts, Mr. Stoddard, the maternal grand-father of the celebrated Jonathan Edwards, adopted the principle, that the Lord's Supper is a converting ordinance, and that merely a moral life, not a change of heart, is essential to admission to full communion. Some churches were influ-

---

\* Dr. Trumbull's History of Connecticut, Vol. I p. 511.

enced, partly by Mr. Stoddard's arguments and still more by a regard for the excellence of his personal character, to fall in with his notions.\* But he was opposed with great research and ability by Dr. Increase Mather, who understood perfectly the origin, principles, and feelings of the churches; and this doctrine was never widely adopted. After a short time the fruits, resulting from this unadvised and unscriptural system, became the most powerful arguments; it was gradually given up in those few churches, where it had been received, (for there is not the slightest ground, that it was even for a moment an authorized part of the Congregational system,) and at the present time it is not known, that there is a single voice in the whole body of the churches, lifted in its favor.

*§ 26. Testimonies of Congregational Writers on this subject.*

Although it might be considered burdensome and unnecessary to heap together all the testimonies, relative to this subject, it, nevertheless, seems suitable to mention some.—The express language of the principles of the Leyden church, as they are given in the Biography of Mr. Robinson by Dr. Belknap, is, “that every church of Christ is to consist only of such, as appear to believe in, and obey him.” Mr. Hooker of Hartford, in Part First of his Survey of the Sum of Church Discipline, defends at some length this proposition, “That persons, whose conversation and expressions be such, so blameless and inoffensive, that according to reason, directed by the Word, we cannot conclude but in charity, there may be, and is some special spiritual good in them, these are fit mat-

---

\* Bogue's and Bennet's History of Dissenters, vol. III. p. 442.

ter of a visible church."—In a work, printed in London, 1647, although written in this country, entitled Church Government and Church Covenant Discussed, in an Answer of the Elders of the several Churches in New England to Thirty Two Questions, &c., we have the following statement: "When a visible church is to be erected, planted, or constituted by the appointment of Christ, it is necessary, that the matter of it, in regard of quality, should be saints by calling, visible Christians, and believers, I Cor. 1: 2, Eph. 1: 2."

"The matter of the visible church, (says the Cambridge Platform, CHAP. III,) are saints by calling." The chapter then goes on to explain and to say, The saints are such as have not only attained the knowledge of the principles of religion, and are free from gross and open scandals, but also do, together with the profession of their faith and repentance, walk in blameless obedience to the Word, so that in charitable discretion they may be accounted saints by calling. It refers in support of the principle laid down to I Cor. 1: 2, Eph. 1: 1, Heb. 6: 1, I Cor. 1: 5, Rom. 15: 14, Ps. 50: 16, 17, Acts 8: 37, Matth. 3: 6; Col. 1: 2, Rev. 2: 14, 15, 20, &c.\*

It ought perhaps to be added here, that in the opinion of the writers above-named, and also agreeably to the Platform, the children of those, who are in full communion, are entitled to be considered members of the Church, although in a peculiar and restricted sense. This subject it will be necessary to resume hereafter.

#### *§ 27. Of the number requisite for a Church Gathering.*

Sometimes it becomes necessary to gather a Church in a village, where, through the decay of religion, the for-

---

\* See also, among various other testimonies, Heads of Agreement between the Congregationalists and Presbyterians, drawn up in 1692, APP. I.

inner light has been extinguished ; sometimes in a new settlement, where the ordinances of the Gospel have not before been regularly maintained ; sometimes in large cities, where either former Churches are overflowing in number, or residents recently arrived do not find suitable religious accommodations. The number, which shall unite together in the work of a Church gathering, is not professed to be fixed, varying of course with particular circumstances, and consequently to be determined according to the good judgment of those particularly interested. There is, however, a partial limitation to this statement.

"The Jews of old, (says Cotton Mather,) held, That less than ten men of leisure could not make a Congregation. It is perhaps in opposition to this tradition, that our Saviour said, Matt. 18: 20, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them:* And hence Tertullian encourages himself to say, *UBI TRES, ECCLESIA EST, LICET LAICI.* Nevertheless, because it has been apprehended, that a rule of Church discipline in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew cannot well be reduced into practice by any number under seven, and for more reasons that might be rendered, seven is the least number that has been allowed among us as capable to form a church state for the enjoyment of all special ordinances; but usually there is a larger number expected." Rat. Dis. ART. I.

It may be added, that when circumstances are such, that there might be a considerably larger number than is here proposed, it is neither necessary nor usual to take, in the first instance, all, who are acknowledged to be candidates for subsequent admission. Agreeably to these views, when the Church of New-Haven was originally formed, about the year 1639, the body of Christians, who

had been providentially brought together in that place, first selected twelve, and from that number seven, to lay the foundation of the ecclesiastical gathering. As was fitting, these **SEVEN** were known by the whole community to be of established character for piety and discretion. These men, whose honourable names are still preserved, were called the **SEVEN PILLARS**, in allusion without doubt to the passage in Proverbs; "Wisdom hath builded her house; she hath hewn out her seven pillars." The method of proceeding was similar in this respect in the original formation of the Churches in the towns of Milford and Guisane county. And it cannot be denied that the principle involved in this method, although the limitation of the number to seven was not absolutely necessary, is a correct one; evidently tending to secure purity in the Church, and for that reason entitled to be maintained. It remains on this point merely to be observed further, that if the number ordinarily ought not to be less than seven, it ought not on the other hand ordinarily to be greater than can be accommodated, with the families attending, in one place of worship, and can experience a suitable watch and care from one minister, provided, as is usually the case, there be but one.

#### §. 28. *Of Articles of belief.*

The duty of an ecclesiastical union being admitted, and the individuals being selected for this important work, they are next to ascertain their mutual willingness to assent to certain articles of belief. Our feelings and practice are so closely connected with our speculative notions, and are in fact so much dependent on them, that this step is obviously necessary. It is not generally considered important that the articles of faith of particular churches should be very numerous or very minute. The

fewer in number, and the plainer in expression, the better it will be ; provided they do not omit the fundamental principles of the Gospel. These articles will of course be in accordance with what are known to be the speculative sentiments of the great body of the Congregational Churches ; inasmuch as wherever there is a disagreement even in speculative notions, provided those notions are maintained to be important, the bonds of harmonious union must inevitably break asunder. But while it is very evident, that no religious sect can exist without insisting on agreement in fundamental points of doctrine, it is not denied, that neither Congregationalists, nor any other sect have a right to enforce the consciences of men. All the right they possess is, in the first place, carefully to endeavor to learn the will of God in his Word, and in view of such careful examination, they have a right also to say on what conditions other bodies are entitled to bear their distinctive name, and to share their fellowship. If individuals, or any body of men are dissatisfied with those conditions, they can enter into fellowship with others, with whose principles they more nearly agree ; there is no restriction, no force ; in the language of Milton,

"The world is all before them, where to choose  
"Their place of rest, and Providence their guide."

They may join themselves with any of the numerous denominations into which the Christian world is split up, with whom they can conscientiously form an union. And if they imagine all to have gone astray, they are at liberty to act by themselves, and to worship by themselves, if they consider it their duty so to do ; and none has a right to molest or make them afraid.

#### §. 29. *Of the Covenant, and grounds of the same.*

Having ascertained each other's speculative belief, the proposed members are now ready to form a sort of

practical agreement, to enter into a mutual promise which is commonly called a COVENANT. Such an agreement, when we consider the objects had in view, recommends itself fully to the dictates of every one's correct judgment, besides being warranted by the Scriptures. It is as reasonable, and as necessary too, for Christians to unite together for religious purposes, by a covenant either express or implied, as it is for civil corporations to covenant with each other, in like manner, for civil purposes. It must be obvious to every one, that the end in view, viz. the fulfilment of the commands of Christ and mutual edification and support in the Christian life, not only justifies but requires such a reciprocal agreement. Indeed, unless we admit that every individual may of himself form a Church, which is a notion too singular to be worthy of remark, it must be admitted, that it is impossible for a Church to be formed at all, without a covenant, since it is allowedly impossible, that men should act together for any length of time, and for common objects, without a mutual understanding.

### §. 30. *Covenants authorized by Scripture.*

But, as was observed, the practice of religious covenanting is not only agreeable to correct judgment, but is warranted by the Scriptures. It is no doubt familiar in the recollections of all, that God entered into a covenant with Abraham and his family, (Gen. 17.;) in which certain blessings were promised on the part of God, and the performance of certain duties was required on the part of the patriarch. This covenant had been neglected and violated by the descendants of Abraham while resident in Egypt, but God, after having delivered them from their grievous bondage, condescended to make with them another covenant: pronouncing them, if they would con-

form to the covenant about to be proposed, a peculiar treasure, a holy nation, Exo. 9 : 1—5. And in allusion to this transaction, the people of Israel are subsequently called (Acts 7 : 38,) "the CHURCH in the Wilderness." This covenant was afterwards publicly renewed and confirmed in a solemn manner, (Deut. 29 : 10—13.) The consent on the part of the people in these solemn transactions was sometimes given silently, that is, merely implied, as in Gen. 17, Deut. 29 and 30; at other times, it was given in express words, Exo. 19 : 8, Deut. 5 : 27, Josh. 24 : 16, 17, 18, 25; and in one instance by writing and sealing, Neh. 9 : 38.

In the instances of religious covenanting, which are mentioned in the Bible, it is frequently the case, that the agreement on the part of the people relates to their submission to the precepts and ordinances of God, without any particular regard and mutual pledging to each other. In other instances there are promises, which lay the covenanters under obligations to each other; *They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, &c.* Neh. 10 : 28—31. And this instance of solemn covenanting agrees in spirit at least, with what the Apostle, (2d Cor. 8 : 5,) says of the members of the Thessalonian Church, That they first gave themselves up to God, and then to the Apostle and his associates; that is, to their brethren. And here it may be suitably remarked, that this should be the manner of all Church covenants. The subjects of them ought first, relying on the blood of Christ, sincerely to surrender themselves in all things to God, and then to the brotherhood; and this, it is believed, is the form; which has generally been assumed by the Covenants of particular Congregational Churches. That is; they are usually made up of two parts; the first being a mutual

promise to give themselves up to God, and the second to each other. And although we may conceive of a Church united together by an implied or unwritten covenant merely, it is deemed altogether desirable and preferable, that it should be express and recorded.

### § 31. *Sentiments of the Primitive and of Foreign churches.*

In this practice of religious covenanting, Congregationalists consider themselves not only supported by reason and the Scriptures, but approved by the sentiments of the Churches immediately after the age of Christ, and by the opinions also of certain worthy religious fraternities of more recent origin. On this point the following observations are to be found in Mather's *Ratio Disciplinæ*.—"Antiquity, (says that writer,) is no stranger to this notion. It is Tertullian's description of a Church, **CORPUS SUMUS, DE CONSCIENTIA RELIGIONIS, ET DISCIPLINÆ UNITATE, ET SPEI FOEDERE**, which is as much as to say, A body united for the conscientious observation of the duties of religion, by an agreement in discipline, and a Covenant of hope for eternal blessedness. The same, Tertullian, in his *Apology*, says that the Christians then assembled, **AD CONFOEDERANDAM DISCIPLINAM**, which intimates, that they had a discipline and a Covenant for the discipline.

Pliny, the governor of Bythynia, relates, in his letter to the Emperor, (which our Tertullian also refers to,) that some renegado Christians, being examined about their secret, but sacred conventicles of the faithful in those primitive times, confessed no worse of them, than this, That they entered into a Covenant, to do no dishonest thing in the world; **NE FURTA, NE LATROCINIA, NE ADUL-**

TERIA COMMITTENT, NE FIDEM PALLERENT, NE DEPOSITUM ABNEGARENT.

In the Apology of Justin Martyr, who lived within a few years of the Apostles themselves, we find the Christians, who were admitted into Church fellowship, agreeing in a resolution to conform in all things to the Word of God ; which seems to be as truly a Church Covenant, as any in the Churches of New-England. And these Churches hope, that they shall not hear that reproached, as a new invention, which was practised in the second and third centuries.

The famous Dr. Hornbeck, a professor in the University of Leyden, who wrote in defence of the Presbyterian Church government, has published his approbation of what the New English divines, Cotton, and Mather, and Norton, wrote in defence of their explicit Church government.

And Zepperus writes it, as the manner and order of the Churches in Holland, That when any persons are admitted unto the Lord's table there, they make a public profession of their faith before all the church; and likewise COVENANT, that they will continue in that faith, and lead their lives accordingly. Several Synods in Holland have required personal covenanting with God and the church ; and the incomparable Voetius highly applauds their doing so."

### § 32. *Method of Proceeding, Day of Prayer, &c.*

But the agreeing on the terms of the Confession of Faith and of the Covenant, is a weighty proceeding ; requiring care, time, and particularly religious preparation. Hence it has been a very judicious and commendable practice for the persons, who are proposed, and expect to engage in this undertaking, to set apart a day, to be

spent together in prayer with fasting. The object of this is to obtain a more intimate acquaintance with each other's character, to confess their unworthiness and their dependence on God, and to obtain his blessing.

Sometimes there is more than one day set apart for these ends. And usually on some occasion of this kind, when the mind may be supposed to be peculiarly susceptible of correct and serious impressions, the Confession of Faith and the Covenant are read and subscribed; or if the written signature be not given, they are in some other way assented to.—It may be added here, that previous to this, those persons, who are members of distant churches, are expected to acquaint them with their intentions, and to obtain from them testimonials of their character, and dismissions to the new church about to be gathered.\*

### § 33. *Assistance from neighboring Churches.*

The assenting to the Articles of Faith and the Covenant is not, according to the practice of Congregationalists, the completion of the steps, attending a church-gathering. Intending to become a Congregational church, and knowing it to be one of the general or fundamental principles of that body, that the Christian

---

\* See an account of the gathering of the First Congregational Church in England, in Neal's History of the Puritans, Pt. II. ch. 2; and of the formation of the Churches of New-Haven, Milford, and Guilford in Trumbull's History of Connecticut, ch. 18; and also of the first church, gathered in Salem, Mass. in Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence, ch. x. There is also an interesting and minute narration of the origin of the first church in Portsmouth, N. H. of which the Rev. Joshua Moody had the care, to be found in the recently published Annals of Portsmouth, by Nathaniel Adams, Esq. In these and in many other historical narrations, the principles and practices, mentioned in this chapter, are abundantly illustrated and confirmed.

brotherhood owe to each other acts of reciprocal communion and fellowship, they now agree upon certain neighboring churches; and making known, that they have taken the steps, preliminary to their complete organization and acknowledgment as a Congregational church, desire them to meet on a certain day, to aid in the further progress in this undertaking. This communication is made by means of what are termed *Letters Missive*,\* which are read before the respective churches for their consideration by their pastors, to whom they are ordinarily addressed, or by the deacons, in case there be no pastors.

The neighboring churches, (so many as are deemed necessary and proper to be sent to,) meet, by means of their pastors and delegates, at the place assigned; usually in the early part of the day. Being called to order by some one of the more aged members of the Council, who reads the Letter Missive, they proceed to choose a moderator, who opens the session with devout supplications, suited to the object before them. And now having learnt more distinctly the number and objects of those, by whom they are called together, and having ascertained the testimonials, both verbal and written, of their Christian character, and considered all objections made

---

\* The LETTER MISSIVE, sent on these occasions, is usually in some such form as this; and to the following purport:

N—, January 22d, 1829.  
To the Congregational Church in N—,

Greeting.

The undersigned, being, some of them, members of separate and distant churches, and all of them hoping to live as the renewed and humble followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, ask leave respectfully to represent, that there is no Congregational Church in the town of N—, where they reside, [or as the case may be, no church, in connexion with which, they can be suitably and desirably accommodated.] Accordingly after much consideration and prayer, they esteem it to be a duty, and are desirous

to them by persons so disposed, they further proceed to examine their Confession and Covenant.

Having ended this examination, the Council in private session consider the propriety and duty of proceeding further. If they find it right and suitable to proceed, they then assign to certain fit persons of their number the religious duties, which remain to be performed in public. And in making these assignments, they have a regard to the wishes of the proposed Church, and do not ordinarily find occasion to differ from them, when they are found to have expressed a desire, that certain individuals should perform particular parts.

### § 34. *Of the public religious Exercises, &c.*

The public services soon commence in the meeting-house, and all persons, who desire to be present, are admitted; generally no small multitude. Seats are reserved for the Council, and also for the members of the proposed new church.—Ordinarily the exercises commence with a short prayer; acknowledging the divine excellencies, and seeking the favor of God on the services and solemnities of the occasion, followed by reading some portion of the Scriptures and singing. Then there is a prayer of greater length, as on the Sabbath, followed by singing, and then by a sermon, which, as well as all

Agreeably, therefore, to the usage of the Congregational churches, we solicit your attendance, by your pastor and delegate, at N—, the day of February next, to advise and assist in the aforementioned purpose. The other churches sent to are the first Congregational church in A, and the Congregational churches in D, H, &c. The place of meeting is the house of ——, and at 9 o'clock, A. M.

the other exercises, is expected to have particular reference to the occasion, on which the assembly is met together. At the close of the sermon, the moderator informs the people, that an Ecclesiastical Council has been assembled at the appointed time and place, for the purpose of aiding in constituting and organizing a Congregational church. The persons, who were found by them to be proposed for the work, are then named. The Moderator further states, that the Council are satisfied as to the religious character of the persons before named, which has been approved to them by testimonials from other churches, or in other ways; and that in the deliberations of the Council no objection, worthy of being received, has been brought forward by any one. He then reads the Confession of Faith and the Covenant in the presence of the whole assembly; and having finished the reading, he asks the proposed members, who at this time are generally standing up, if they continue to yield their assent to said Confession and Covenant, which they signify accordingly. He then proposes the question to the Council, whether they are prepared to acknowledge them publicly as a Church, to which they assent. A declaration made by the Moderator to that effect, accompanied by a few affectionate and devout remarks.

There is then a prayer of some length, usually termed the **CONSECRATING PRAYER**, in which, among other solemn and suitable topics, the suppliant does not fail to find abundant occasion to speak of the goodness of God in establishing a church, of the duty incumbent on Christians to enter into the church state, and to supplicate in particular the blessing of God on those individuals, who have entered into that holy and important relation.—After this, some one of the Council, to whom the

duty has been allotted; expresses what is termed the ~~FEL~~  
LOWSHIP OF THE CHURCHES. This is a suitable occasion, not only to express the sincere and affectionate regard and interest of neighboring churches, but to assert and insist on the great principle of Congregationalism,\* that the churches are not independent of each other, but are bound, by the principles of the Gospel, to exercise a mutual watch, love, and assistance. The fellowship of the churches being thus given, the exercises, on these highly solemn and joyful occasions, are generally concluded in the usual way by prayer, singing, and the pronouncing of the benediction.

### § 35. *Forms of Church Articles and Covenant.*

Congregationalists have their principles of belief; certain fundamental religious doctrines. Those principles are stated at length in their public Confessions. And we may say, with truth, although the nature of the human mind forbids us to anticipate, in large multitudes, a perfect and inflexible belief in every particular, that they yield as united, hearty, and sincere consent to their fundamental doctrines, as any body of Christians whatever. Still it is their practice in the admission of members to a particular church, to require their express assent only to a few prominent doctrines, selected by that church itself.

---

\* The communion, mutual aid, and accountability of the Churches has already been repeatedly mentioned, as an important Congregational principle; and that Congregationalists do not hold to the independency of Churches, as the term would be naturally understood. There are abundant evidences of this declaration of an historical and incidental kind; saying nothing of the Platforms. But the object of this note is merely to remark, that testimony, not only of a very interesting, but of the most clear, and satisfactory character, may be found in a work, entitled, **THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF NEW ENGLAND CONCERNING THE SUBJECT OF BAPTISM AND THE COMMUNION OF CHURCHES.** by Increase Mather, printed in 1675.

These subordinate confessions of faith, (i. e. the confessions of particular churches,) are not always expressed in the same way; but no Congregational church could be formed, or would be acknowledged as possessing that character, whose private Confession of Faith, which is particularly submitted to the inspection of the neighboring churches at the time of its being gathered, and is ever after subject to such inspection, was found to be at variance with the fundamental principles of the GENERAL CONFESSION OR CREED of the whole body.

The following may be given as a specimen of the Confessions of Faith, and also of the Covenants of particular churches.

#### CONFESSiON OF FAITH.

We believe, there is one God, self-existent, eternal, perfectly holy, the creator and rightful disposer of all things, subsisting in a manner mysterious to us, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe, that the Bible is the revealed will of God to mankind, and was given by inspiration, as the only unerring rule of faith, and practice. We believe, that mankind are fallen from their original rectitude, and are, while in a state of nature, wholly destitute of that holiness, which is required by the divine Law. We believe, that Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, was made flesh, or in a mysterious manner became man, and by his obedience, sufferings, and death, made full satisfaction for the sins of the world, and opened a way, by which all, who believe in him with repentance for their sins, may be saved without an impeachment of the divine justice and truth. We believe, that they, and they only, will be saved in consequence of the merits of Christ, who are born of the Spirit, and united by a living faith to the Son of God. We believe, that God has appointed a day, in which he will

judge the world, when there will be a resurrection of the dead, and when all the righteous will enter on eternal happiness, and all the wicked will be condemned to eternal misery.

#### Covenant.

Humbly hoping, that we are united to Christ by faith, feeling ourselves under indispensable obligations to acknowledge him before men, and unite with his visible Church, we solemnly vouch Jehovah to be our God ; the Lord Jesus Christ to be our ruler, teacher, and Saviour ; the Holy Spirit, our guide and Sanctifier ; the holy Scriptures, our rule of faith and practice. We make an unreserved surrender of ourselves, and whatever belongs to us, to the service of God ; promising to promote, with all our powers, the interests of the religion of Christ, and to recommend it by presenting in our conduct a constant example of justice, temperance, charity, and godliness.

We further promise to walk together with the members of this Church, as becomes those of the same redeemed household ; in the exercise of Christian affection, in the discharge of christian duty, and in submission to its watch and discipline. Relying for assistance on the Holy Spirit, we make these solemn declarations and promises in the presence of this assembly, in the presence of Angels, in the presence of God, the Creator and Judge of all. (See §. 56, ch. V. of this work ; also Mather's **RATIO Disc.** at Art. I.)

**CHAPTER FOURTH.****CHURCH OFFICERS.**

§ 36. *The need of officers in the church shown from the light of Nature.*

A church, in consequence of accidental circumstances, may exist for a time without officers. It may not only exist, but it possesses the ordinary rights, privileges, and powers of a church; as far at least, as they are susceptible of being realized in its present situation. "It has the power," (says the Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared, Pt. II. p. 22,\* &c.) "to receive

---

**\* JOHN COTTON.**

Perhaps no name holds a more conspicuous place in the history of the Congregationalists of this country than John Cotton, author of the Work here referred to. While faithfully discharging the ordinary duties of the ministry, and, from time to time, employing his discerning pen on various other topics, he found time to write much on the subject of Church Polity. The tendency of his writings is, throughout, in support of the principles, laid down in the Cambridge Platform; in the formation of which he is understood to have greatly contributed. Of course some of the principles, he maintained, suffered the fate of certain parts of the Platform, being reluctantly adopted by the Churches and very soon abandoned; but the great majority, especially those of chief moment, still remain. His book of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven is particularly valuable.

Besides this work, and The Way of the Churches Cleared against Messrs. Baylie and Rutherford, quoted in the text, he wrote, on the subject of the Congregational system, A letter in answer to Objections made against the New England Churches, with the Questions proposed to such as are admitted to Church fellowship, 1641; The true Constitution of a particular visible Church, 1643; The Way of the Churches of Christ in New England, 1645; and a work, printed in 1650, on the Holiness of Church members, proving, that visible saints are the matter of a Church.

members, to elect officers, and to do such other acts, as do not require office rule and office power."—"Although destitute of officers, it hath in it a radical or virtual power, whereby it may call forth such officers, as may administer all those acts of office rule or power, which, of itself without them, it could not exercise."

Although it is a principle of the Congregational system, that a church may exist for a time, under certain circumstances, without officers; the appointment of officers is, nevertheless, rightly considered essential to its permanent and perfect organization. The dictates of reason, (in other words, that **LIGHT OF NATURE**, of which we have already had occasion to speak,) approve of, and require officers in the church. Churches are from their very nature corporations, and have been considered such in law; but no corporation, whether civil, literary, or commercial, or formed for other purposes, would expect to flourish, or even to exist permanently, without them. Every church member without doubt has duties to perform; but there are other duties, the performance of which no individual would feel himself at liberty to assume, except it devolved upon him by vote, or in some other way. But evidently the devolving on an individual by vote, or in some other authorized way, the right and duty to do that, which he would not otherwise be at liberty to do, is conferring an office, and constituting the individual an officer.

Accordingly it is very reasonably and properly said in the Platform of 1648, (commonly called the Cambridge Platform,) "A church being a company of people combined together by covenant for the worship of God, it appeareth thereby, that there may be the essence and being of a church without any officers, seeing there is both the form and matter of a church; which is implied, when it is said, *the Apostles ordained elders in every*

*church, Acts 14: 23.* Nevertheless, though officers be not absolutely necessary to the simple being of churches, when they be called ; yet ordinarily to their calling they are, and to their well being.” See Camb. Plat. Chap. VI. §§ 1, 2.

§. 37. *Church officers recognized in the Scriptures.*

The selection of persons to sustain offices in the church, is not more conformable to reason, than it is to the Scriptures. The Jewish Church had its officers, its high priest, its priests, and its Levites. They were especially and formally set apart for the purpose of superintending such ceremonies and regulations, as had respect to the instituted mode of worship. To them it belonged to announce the festival days, to select the victims for sacrifice, to burn the incense, to change the shew-bread on the Sabbath, to tend the fire on the altar for burnt offerings. Happily for us, who live under a more merciful dispensation, we have no need of officers for these purposes ; and still the Christian Church has never been without them.

Christ is the head ; holding the highest office in the Christian Church. He is our high priest ; he continueth forever, and hath an unchangeable priesthood ; and yet needeth not daily to offer up sacrifice. And there are other officers under Christ ; approved by his infinite wisdom, and destined, in an emphatic manner, to forward those plans of mercy, for which he was willing to give up his life.—Paul and Barnabas, acting according to the mind of Christ, ordained elders in every Church, *Acts 14: 23.* Paul directed Titus to ordain elders or presbyters in the towns of Crete, *Tit. 1: 5.* The Apostle, speaking of the Saviour, says, “ *He gave some, apostles ; and some, prophets ; and some, evangelists ; and some,*

*pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,* Eph. 4 : 11, 12.

Although the appointment of Church officers is agreeable to the common sense of mankind, and is warranted by the history of the Church in all ages, it is well known, that the different sects in religion do not agree as to the requisite number of them, their names, or their powers. Nor is there reason to doubt, that this disagreement, although it is at times attended with collisions, and with dissatisfaction, is permitted for various wise and beneficial ends.

#### § 38. *Number of Officers in Congregational Churches. Ruling Elders.*

There are but two officers, known at the present time in the Congregational churches ; **MINISTERS**, (otherwise called **pastors**,) and **deacons**.

Formerly there was another class of officers, a sort of intermediate grade between ministers and deacons, called **RULING ELDERS**. It was considered as falling to these officers, to call together and to dismiss the church ; to prepare business in private, in order that it might be more speedily acted on in public ; to feed the flock with a word of admonition, &c.—That this office existed in the time of the Apostles, was supposed to be evident, in particular, from the first Epistle of Timothy, 5 : 17 ; “*Let the elders, that rule well, [or who discharge their office well,] be counted worthy of double honor, [that is, as the connexion seems to require, of double compensation,] especially those, who labor in the word and doctrine.*” This passage was thought to imply, that there were officers in the church, called **RULING ELDERS**, whose business ordinarily was not to teach or communicate by laboring in

word and doctrine, although this duty sometimes fell to them; and of course the office was a kind of intermediate one between that of ministers and deacons. Accordingly, Ruling Elders are fully recognized in the Cambridge Platform, and the duties, pertaining to them, are particularly pointed out.

But it was questioned by some even from the beginning, as no other passage of evident weight was brought forward, Whether the office was *JURE DIVINO*, that is, appointed and required by the Scriptures. It was early objected, that the last clause of the passage in Timothy might be rendered thus; *Especially they laboring in word and doctrine*; or in this way, *Especially as they labor in word and doctrine*; which gives very essentially a new turn to the passage. At any rate, the office, and the reasons, by which it was supported, were not generally satisfactory. That there were great doubts in regard to it, and that it was never at any period fully sanctioned and approved by the churches, is fully evident from the ecclesiastical history of the country.\*

#### § 39. *Further remarks on the office of Ruling Elders.*

The disposition, which has been mentioned, on the part of the churches, not to sanction and put in force the part of the Platform of Cambridge, relative to Ruling Elders, gained strength by time; and that for various reasons.—(1.) One reason, beside the alleged want of full and decisive Scripture authority, was the difficulty of finding men in all the churches, suitable for the office.

---

\* See Joshua Scottow's Old Men's Tears for their own Declensions, &c. published in 1691; as quoted in an interesting Note at p. 32, vol. I. of Winthrop's New England by Savage; also Mather's MAGNALIA, bk. V.; Wise's Church's Quarrel Espoused, PETIT. IV. § 8, pr. 1772; and Home's ECCLESIASTICA METERHENEUTICA, Ques. X.

It was highly important, that the Deacons should be men of piety and of respectable character, but for the office of Ruling Elders there was need of men of a higher grade ; and it was not always easy to obtain them.

(2) It was further thought, that the duties, allotted to the Ruling Elders, might be performed to good purpose by the ministers and deacons, and perhaps in some respects by committees, chosen for a time from among the private members of the churches ; and if so, it would be altogether desirable to avoid those strifes and jealousies, which are very apt to arise from the multiplication of dignities and titles. (3) And among other things, as the office of these Elders was of an executive nature, implying no small degree of authority in the admission, exclusion, and general government of members, it was found to interfere at times with that of the minister himself ; especially when it happened to be associated, as might sometimes be the case, with an undue share of conceit or of pertinacity.\*

Whatever might have been the reasons of it, whether these or others, it is certain, the office was never universally adopted, as a part of the authorised organization of the churches, and that it was soon almost universally rejected. And accordingly for many years it has ceased to hold a place in the arrangements of our ecclesiastical constitution.—With these explanations in respect to ruling elders, we are prepared to enter into a more partic-

---

\* There is reason to believe, it would be no difficult matter, to glean from our ecclesiastical annals sufficient proofs of dissatisfaction and uneasiness, arising between the Pastors and the Ruling Elders. One of the most unhappy religious disputes, that existed in the early periods of the country, that of the church of Hartford in Connecticut, seems to have originated from this cause, viz. the mutual distrust and dissatisfaction of the Pastor and the Ruling Elder.—See Trumbull's History of Connecticut, chap. xiii.

ular consideration of the acknowledged and permanent classes of officers, viz. **DEACONS** and **MINISTERS**.

§ 40. *Office of Deacons.*

The first clear and undoubted account, which we have in the New Testament in respect to the office of deacons, is to be found at the commencement of the sixth chapter of Acts. “*And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason, that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look you out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenias, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch; whom they set before the Apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.*”

In this account, it is worthy of being remarked, that it was left by the Apostles to the church of Jerusalem to make choice of the persons. And, therefore, we may well conclude, that the practice of Congregationalists, who appoint to this office by a vote of the church, is sanctioned by Apostolic authority.—It would seem also, that in this instance there was the imposition of hands, which is practised in the ordination of ministers, in the setting apart to this office. But, in the Congregational Churches, this ceremony, at the setting apart of deacons, has

been disused for many years ; as we shall again have occasion to notice before leaving this subject.

#### § 41. *Of the duties of Deacons.*

It is not the sense of the churches, nor has it been for many years, that the duties of a deacon are limited, in the language of the Cambridge Platform, (ch. vii. § 4,) "to the care of the temporal good things of the church." The duties, connected with the office, are various and important ; especially since all thoughts are given up of the acknowledgment and re-establishment of the office of Ruling Elders.

(1) DEACONS are to be, in various respects, assistants to the ministers. As the pastors or bishops of churches are required "to hold fast the faithful word as they have been taught ;" so the deacons, in the precepts respecting them in the first Epistle of Timothy, are directed "to hold the mystery of the faith ;" that is, to understand and maintain the peculiar doctrines of the Christian system. And it is further required of them, that they be men of gravity and sincerity ; neither given to the indulgence of pleasure, nor greedy of filthy lucre. —The Scriptures, therefore, being so explicit in requiring such qualifications, it seems to be an obvious inference, that duties, not only of a high, but of a religious nature, are to be performed by them ; something more than merely giving their attention to the church's temporal concerns. But these duties, whatever they may be, are expected to be subordinate to those of the minister, and to be rendered by way of assistance to him. Accordingly it is supposed to fall to the deacons, (and the practice of the churches is in accordance with this opinion,) to arrange in connexion with the pastors such religious meetings of a more private nature as may be necessary ;

to take the lead in such meetings in the pastor's absence ; to guide and instruct inquirers after the religious life, so far as may be in their power ; and, in all other suitable ways, to promote the interests of the Christian cause.

(2) Among other things, it is the practice, at church meetings for mere business, for the deacons, in the absence of the pastor, to act as moderator. When there is more than one present, (there ordinarily being two and sometimes more to each church,) the discharge of this duty seems naturally to come upon the elder, unless it be otherwise arranged between them.

(3) It is the business of the deacons to take charge of the sacramental vessels and of other property, subject to the direction of the church as a body ; also to prepare the elements for the communion, and to distribute them to those, who partake. They are likewise to inquire into the number and circumstances of the indigent members of their respective churches, and to distribute to them that provision, which it is incumbent on the churches to make for such persons.—And it may not be irrelevant to remark, that the duties, incident to the deacon's office, [are not intended by the Congregational churches to be merely nominal ; they are highly important ; and there is abundant reason for saying, the prosperity of the cause of religion depends greatly on the due performance of them.

#### § 42. *Further remarks on the duties of Deacons.*

Although Deacons, in the absence of the Pastor, may take the lead in religious meetings, and may read the Scriptures, and make practical remarks, the order and well-being of the churches require, that they be careful not to entrench upon what are appropriately pastoral duties ; and, therefore, they are not considered at liberty to

select a text and preach from it what has to the audience the appearance of a Sermon, and is designed to be such ; nor is it proper for them to dismiss the assembly with a formal benediction, such as is customarily heard, at the breaking up of religious assemblies, from the lips of the minister.

The reasons of these directions, saying nothing of the plain Scripture distinction between the duties of pastors and deacons, are obvious. There are certain distinctive, we might almost say, sacred associations with the character of a minister, which are important to be sustained, and which would be broken up, by authorising such a course on the part of the deacons ; beside the additional evils of disorder and various jealousies. These evils are not merely imaginary, but have developed themselves at various times. Look, for example, at the first Congregational church in New England, that of Plymouth in Massachusetts ; the immediate and worthy offspring of Mr. Robinson's church in Leyden. This church had no pastor for a number of years ; the Ruling Elder, Mr. Brewster, was a diffident man, although possessed of excellent sense and learning ; the brethren of the church often spoke in its meetings, as was natural, and under certain limitations would have been highly beneficial. But a spirit of pride and self-sufficiency was fostered, which seems to have spread itself into other churches in the Plymouth Colony, and the results were unhappy.—“The preachments of those, whom they called gifted brethren, (says Cotton Mather, *MAGNALIA*, Bk. I. ch. iii. § 7,) produced those discouragements unto their ministers, that almost all the ministers left the Colony, apprehending themselves driven away by the insupportable neglect and contempt, with which the people on this occasion treated them. And this dark hour of eclipse upon the light of the Gospel

in the churches of the Colony continued until their humiliation and reformation before the great Shepherd of the sheep, who hath since blessed them with a succession of as worthy ministers as most in the land."

Under the GIFTED BRETHREN, here mentioned, we may suppose deacons to be included ; and if not, the statement, which is made, clearly illustrates the inexpediency of that state of things, which is designed to be opposed. And we may plead not only the lessons of history, but the authority of the founders of our Churches. Mr. Robinson in his *APOLOGY\** allows, that not only deacons, but lay-members, strictly so called, may *prophesy*, (as the phrase then was;) that is, may explain the Scriptures, and exhort ; but he contends, that this practice ought to be, in some measure, subjected to the permission and control of ministers. Such, at least, is the obvious spirit of his remarks.

#### § 43. *Induction of Deacons into Office.*

Deacons are appointed by the particular churches, in which they are expected to exercise their office ; it having ever been an admitted principle, that the election of all their officers rests with the churches alone. They are inducted into their office, or rather enter upon its duties, with but little ceremony. The practice, however, in this particular, was certainly different in former times from what it is at present. When Philip and Prochorus and others had been chosen deacons by the church of Jerusalem, we read, that they were set before the Apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

Coming down to the times of our own particular sect, we are informed in the history of the First Church in Boston,\* that the imposition of hands was practised, as a

\* At chapter viii. as quoted in Dr. Belknap's Am. Biography, Art. Wm. Brewster.

\* Emerson's Historical Sketch of the First Church in Boston, Sect. I.

sign of consecration, in respect to deacons, as well as ministers.

This ceremony on the introduction of deacons into their office, which is known to have been practised by various other churches, is recognized in the Platform;\* “*Church officers are not only to be chosen by the church, Acts xiii. 3, xiv. 23; but also to be ordained by imposition of hands and prayer, with which at the ordination of Elders, fasting is also to be joined, 1st Tim. v. 22.*”

But this mode of consecration, (by the imposition of hands as in the ordination of a minister,) is not practised at the present day; or at least but very seldom. On what grounds this has happened, has not been fully explained; and it has been attended with regret on the part of some, although approved by the greater number. But while the ceremony of imposition of hands seems to be permanently abolished in respect to deacons, it is evidently necessary for the good of religion, that the minds of the people be directed towards the office; and it, therefore, seems suitable, that the pastor should improve the occasion of an appointment to the deaconship by publicly remarking on the nature of the office and the duties of the incumbent. This has commonly been done; and this exposition of the nature of the office, &c. is sometimes accompanied with a particular address to the person, chosen to it.

#### § 44. *Office of Minister or Pastor.*

There is evidently, say those whose principles we are endeavoring to give an account of, a higher office, recognized in the Scriptures, than that of deacons, viz. the office of pastors or ministers. This officer is commonly mentioned in the New Testament under the name of ELDER, though sometimes under that of Overseer or Bish-

---

\* Camb. Platf. Chap. IX.

op. Accordingly, (Acts xx. 17, 28,) the Elders of the church of Ephesus are required to take heed to the flock, over which the Holy Ghost had made them Overseers; the original of this last word, *EPISCOPOI*, being in some other places rendered Bishops; see Philipp. i. 1, first Tim. iii. 2, Tit. i. 5—7.

That *Elders*, which is a general term for certain church officers, is used as synonymous with Bishops or overseers, seems to be particularly confirmed from the manner, in which the subject is treated, in the passage last referred to. “*For this cause, says the Apostle, left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things, that are wanting, and ordain Elders in every city, as I had appointed thee; if any be blameless, &c.*” In this passage Titus is required to set apart certain persons as Elders for the service of the churches in the Cretan cities, if there were any to be found, possessing a particular character. And immediately after, the reason of such an express and careful direction is given, viz. That a *Bishop must be blameless, not self-willed, not given to anger*, and the like. So that evidently the connexion and obvious meaning of the passages taken together render it necessary to consider Elders and Bishops synonymous.

It would seem, then, that elders and bishops or overseers, whatever might be their appropriate duties, and whatever relation they might sustain to the subordinate office of deacons, were one and the same grade or species of Church officer. But nothing is more evident than the fact, that the elders of the New Testament were the ministers or pastors of particular churches. And if so, it is consistently inferred, that the Scriptures do not elevate bishops, which is but another name for elders or pastors, to an ascendancy and control over an assemblage or multitude of churches. Whatever opinions may be

held by other Christian denominations, this is, at least, the doctrine of Congregationalists ; they know no lower officer than deacons, and none higher than pastors ; they consider these two classes of officers to be fully recognized in the Scriptures, and both of them to be of great importance.\*

#### § 45. *Distinction of Elders or ministers into Teaching and Pastoral.*

In the early periods of our ecclesiastical history, two ministers were required to each church. Nor in general did the churches fail of supporting the required number, except from accidental circumstances. The general terms, ELDER, and MINISTER, were then applied to both indiscriminately ; while the subordinate distinction of office was indicated by the terms, TEACHING, and PASTORAL. So that we often read of a teaching elder or teacher, and of a pastoral elder or pastor in the same church ; as in the first Congregational church in Boston, Mr. Wilson was many years Pastor, while Mr. John Cotton was at the same time Teacher. This distinction of ministers into teachers and pastors is thus noticed in the sixth chapter of the Cambridge Platform : “ *The pastor's special work is to administer a word of wisdom, Eph. iv. 11, Rom. xii. 7, 8, first Cor. xiii. 8. The teacher is to*

---

\* This subject is remarked upon by almost all the writers, whom we have occasion to refer to ; in some incidentally ; in others more at large. Those, who wish to see it examined more particularly, will find it carefully treated, and at some length, in the writings of Dr. Dwight. Among other topics, relative to the general subject, he attempts to show by various quotations, that there is an agreement in the sentiments of Congregationalists with those of a number of eminent Episcopalian writers.—See THEOLOGY, explained and defended, in a Series of Sermons by Timothy Dwight, S. T. D. L. L. D. Ser. CL. CLI.

*attend to doctrine, and therein to administer a word of knowledge, 1 Tim. iv. 1, 2, Tit. xi. 9; and either of them to administer the seals of that covenant, unto the dispensation of which they are alike called."*

This arrangement, independently of the support which they supposed it received from the Scriptures, naturally suggested itself to the fervent piety of our forefathers, but time, which infallibly brings out from human systems unforeseen excellencies and defects, has clearly evinced its incompatibility with the prosperity of the churches, and it has consequently been dropped. No formal measures seem to have ever been taken to alter this part of the plan, but it fell away through its own mere weight and deficiency. Beside the increased expense of the method, which many of the churches were unable to bear, it was soon found, it presented an opportunity for rivalships between the ministers themselves and for dissensions in the flock.—Nor does it sufficiently appear, that the passages of Scripture referred to authorize this distinction in the ministry. Indeed the following passage has been justly thought to be utterly inconsistent with it; Eph. iv. 11, “ And he gave [that is, appointed,] some Apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some PASTORS and TEACHERS.” In looking at this passage, it will be noticed, that, in the preceding clauses, certain persons are stated to have been given or appointed as Apostles ; others as Prophets ; others as Evangelists ; but in the last clause there are evidently two classes of duties combined together or two offices in one, and, in reference to this union of duties, others were appointed to be Pastors and Teachers ; that is, to the combined teaching and pastoral office. If this be a correct view, the teaching and pastoral duties are not to be separated, but exercised by the same person.—It may be

incidentally remarked, that the word, **PASTOR**, originally means a Shepherd; and, therefore, in its metaphorical application to the ministry, indicates government or rule, rather than instruction. We read of a Shepherd in the Old Testament, whose pastoral staff was a rod of iron, Ps. ii. 9, *Sept. Vers.*; and the kings of Homer, who undoubtedly knew how to govern, as well as to guide, were the **SHEPHERDS OF THE PEOPLE**.

#### § 46. *Ministerial or pastoral duties.*

The pastors of churches are rightly considered under God the great instruments and means of their prosperity. To the persons, who are called to that important station, the solemn language of Scripture is; “Take heed unto all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” The duties, incumbent upon them, are various; and in a work, which did not aim at conciseness, the considerations, relative to them, might be spread over a volume.

(1.) **PREACHING.**—Of these duties the first perhaps in order and importance is Preaching. It is obviously agreeable to the light of nature, to the common reason of mankind, that some person in every church should be particularly required to perform this service, the object of which is to instruct, guide, and strengthen in the religious life. The reasonableness and importance of this is particularly evident, when we consider, that the subject of religion embraces a vast variety of duties and relations. Although its more striking and characteristic elements are level to the comprehension of all, still it cannot be denied, that the hearers will be greatly aided by more particular views, by the developement of remote principles, and by the application of those principles to partic-

ular situations and circumstances. Among the topics, handled by the preacher, are the character of God, the evils of sin, the mysteries of redemption, the necessity of a renovated heart, and the progressive triumphs of a holy life. They embrace the whole circle of feelings and duties, which bind us to earth and to heaven, to time and to eternity, to our fellow beings and to our Creator.\*

**2. PASTORAL VISITS AND PRIVATE INSTRUCTION.**—Ministers are “to watch for souls, as those, who must give an account.” So solemn a direction seems to imply and to require, that they must concern themselves with individuals, as well as with the great congregation. However careful the minister may be, his public instruction will in general only apply to the public or common wants of his hearers. At any rate there are many troubles of the soul, which can be more effectually counteracted by private conversation, and in the bosom of one's own family. At their firesides the feelings of the people are more readily and freely disclosed than elsewhere ; the seriousness of devotion assumes an unknown loveliness of character, because it ascends to heaven, mingled with all the kindly charities of home ; and a new friendship is formed for the visitant himself, which is the more sacred and dear on account of the place of its origin.

---

\* The earliest preachers of the Congregationalists did not use Notes ; their sermons were unwritten, although they could not always be called extemporaneous. The first person in North America of the Congregational sect, who is known to have used notes, was Rev. John Warham, a worthy minister of Windsor in Connecticut. Cotton Mather, to whom we are indebted for this fact, gives us to understand, that Warham, by this practice, gave considerable offence to some judicious persons, who had never heard him. But he adds, “when they once came to hear him, they could not but admire the notable energy of his ministry.”—The preachers of the present day pursue, in some respects, a middle course. Generally speaking, the more formal sermons, preached on the Sabbath, are

It has also been expected of the pastors of these churches, that they attend in particular to the instruction of children in religious things. Accordingly it is common for them to impart catechetical instruction, and to aid more or less in the formation and support of Sabbath schools and Bible classes. And these means of religious knowledge, through the favor of God, have been greatly blessed.

#### § 47. *The duties of ministers further considered.*

There are various other duties of greater or less importance. At the business meetings of the church, the Pastor acts as MODERATOR; which the superior office, sustained by him, seems to render suitable. It also falls to him, unless it be otherwise arranged in consequence of some temporary or peculiar circumstances, to keep the records of the church, and to act as its clerk. This is a very proper practice, since all instances of baptism, both of infants and of adults, whether the latter be admitted into full communion or not, ought to be noted in the church records. In the admission and exclusion of members, although his vote has in itself no more weight than that of other individuals, it is particularly his duty to inform himself both as to principles and facts.

---

written; but on other occasions, as private lectures and conferences, they frequently preach without notes. And this course seems to give general satisfaction.

A remark of the celebrated Baxter, in reply to certain gainsayers on this subject, is perhaps worthy of being added here. "It is not, (says he,) the want of abilities, that makes us use our notes; but a regard to our work and the good of our hearers. I use notes, as much as any man when I take pains, and as little as any man, when I am lazy, or busy, or have not leisure to prepare. It is easier to us to preach three sermons without notes, than one with them. He is a simple preacher, that is not able to preach a day without preparation, if his strength would serve."

**§ 48. Of committees of Laymen, for religious purposes.**

But it is sometimes asked, Are the two classes of officers, Ministers and Deacons, sufficient for the performance of the duties of the church? Would not its interests be subserved, if there were other grades of office? — Before directly answering such inquiries, let it be noticed, there has undoubtedly existed a jealousy on this subject; an unwillingness to establish in the church a greater number of permanent offices, even if some advantage might at times be expected from it, than are clearly authorised in the Scriptures. Such scruples are not only natural to a truly religious mind, but they commend themselves to common foresight and prudence; especially, when we consider, how prone men are to pervert to improper purposes the power they possess.

Nevertheless there are occasional duties, arising out of the relations and wants of the churches, which are performed, without recourse being had to the pastors or deacons. Members of churches, who sustain no permanent office, are often chosen by their brethren to act as delegates at Conferences, Ordinations, and at other times. Committees also are frequently appointed to perform duties, both secular and religious. For instance, it is the custom in some of the churches to visit formally, perhaps once a year, all their members, by means of a Committee, consisting wholly or in part of laymen. The object of these visits is religious; to learn the spiritual condition of the members, and to excite them to renewed watchfulness and faithfulness.

As, therefore, the lay-members are liable to be called upon for very considerable services, and are in point of fact frequently called upon for such services, it may be safely said, that the interests of our churches need not necessarily remain unattended to, or be in any way neg-

lected. And this system, while it secures the general interest of the churches, possesses the merit, by putting it to new tests and exercises, of communicating additional consistency and beauty to the religious character of lay members who are thus employed.

#### § 49. *Duties of the brotherhood or private members.*

Beside the duties, which are appropriate to particular offices, or the performance of which is especially assigned to a small number of individuals of the church, there are others, which pertain to the whole of the church alike. It makes nothing against this statement, that the duties here referred to, are of a general nature.

(1) The private members or brotherhood are bound to take heed to their PRINCIPLES.—Whether they relate to doctrines or practice, it is their duty to profess them openly and seriously, and to defend them, when they are attacked. They thus escape the imputation of acting under hypocritical pretences, and exhibit a decision, which is becoming in all men, most of all in a follower of the crucified Redeemer. The church is declared to be “the pillar and ground of the truth,” 1st Tim. iii. 15; and again, the church is required “to hold forth the word of life,” Philip. ii. 16. And this may be done in various ways; by refuting the infidel, by reproofing the worldling, and by taking part in the prayers and exhortations of religious meetings. Accordingly it is remarked in commendation of the three thousand, who were baptized at the Pentecost, that they continued STEADFAST in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship.

(2) Furthermore, the private members or brotherhood are bound to take heed to their CONDUCT.—In all their intercourse with the world, their calling enjoins the utmost purity, the most sincere good-will, and the strictest

Integrity. "Whatsoever things, (says the Apostle, Phil. iv. 8,) are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely; whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think of these things." And more than this, they are bound, not only to avoid evil, but to do positive good. They are required to exhibit a living and active holiness, and to see, that the divine excellency of Christ's religion leaves its stamp, not only on their own souls, but on their neighborhood, on their country, on the age in which they live, and on the world. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, (says the Apostle, 1st Cor. xv. 58,) be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know, that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." —See Dr. Owen's Brief Instruction in the Worship of God and Discipline of the Churches, Quest. 24.

## CHAPTER FIFTH.

## ADMISSION OF MEMBERS.

§ 50. *Of the character of those to be admitted.*

The materials of a church are visibly religious persons or saints by calling, as they have sometimes been termed; that is, those, who are professedly and apparently followers of Christ both in principles and practice. Of such it is to be composed in the beginning, and of such only it is to be made good, and increased in subsequent additions. But when it is said, that the members of a church must give evidence of being persons of this description, something more is requisite in their character

and life, than a mere exemption from gross and open scandals. There may be an outward correctness, an unexceptionable exterior in many respects, without true repentance, faith in Christ, or an obedience, flowing wholly from the love of God. There must be some evidence of these, as well as of mere external morality, to entitle men to be considered visible saints.

It is the language of all the writers, to whom we are accustomed to look as authority on these subjects, that the character of church members is of more consequence than their number. They express great anxiety, that those, who profess the name of Christ, should be holy. It is better, that the churches should consist of a few, who fix their minds on the enjoyment of God as their chief good, than that they should embrace multitudes, many of whom are governed by merely worldly motives. That this has ever been a fundamental principle, we have already had repeated occasion to remark.—See §§ 11, 17, 25, compared with Platf. Chap. III.; also W. Bartlet's Model of the Primitive Congregational Way, Chap. II.; Cotton's Way of the Churches of Christ in New England, Chap. III. § 2; Church-Government and Covenant discussed, in an Answer of the Elders of New England to XXXII Questions, Qs. II. &c.

#### § 51. *Claims or right of such to admission.*

These, who are redeemed by the blood of Christ and bear his image, have a claim, a right to church fellowship, and to the privileges, attendant upon it. The church has its origin in the will of God, and not of men; its foundations are deeply laid in the rebellions of the human race, and in the mercy, which has provided for their redemption. No body of mere men, therefore, has a right to control, or act against its principles, but merely

to administer them. It may, undoubtedly, be their duty to extend the blessings of the church state as far as possible; but it is neither their duty, nor their right, to check, and diminish them in any way. Hence no persons, who sincerely assent to the creed and the ecclesiastical organization of a particular church, and give suitable evidence of possessing a christian character, can be refused admission. Accordingly it was long since clearly maintained by Dr. Owen, (ORIGINAL, NATURE, &c. OF CHURCHES, Chap. viii.) that congregational churches can never deny their communion unto any persons, high or low, rich or poor, old or young, male or female, whose application for admission is seconded by such a profession of faith in Christ and of obedience to him, as is not contradicted by sins of life.

The Platform says, (Chap. xii. § 2,) "The things, which are requisite to be found in all church-members, are repentance for sin and faith in Jesus Christ, Acts ii. 38, viii. 42, 37;" implying, that, where these qualifications are had, it is incumbent on the church to receive such. In the next Section of the Platform, are the following judicious and charitable expressions, which may serve, in some measure, to show the sentiments of the framers of that instrument in respect to the subject before us: "The weakest measure of faith is to be accepted in those, that desire to be admitted into the church, Rom. xiv. 1; because weak christians, if sincere, have the substance of that faith, repentance, and holiness, which is required in church members, and such have most need of the ordinances for their confirmation and growth in grace. The Lord Jesus would not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed, Matt. xii. 20; Isa. xl. 11, but gather the tender lambs in his arms and carry them gently in his bosom."

§ 52. *Statements of personal religious experience.*

It is the practice for persons, who are proposed to be admitted into a church, to give some account of their religious belief, and of their personal religious experience. If this practice were not followed, it would be difficult to secure the exclusion of all, who do not give some evidence of a renewed heart; an object so dear to the churches, and so essential to their well-being. Sometimes a written statement is presented to the church, entering, according to circumstances, with greater or less particularity into the details of the person's doctrines and experience; sometimes the statement is verbal; and in other cases, the examination is conducted in the way of question and answer. The mere method or form of the examination is not considered important, but may be different, at different times, according as the situation of the applicant, or of the church, or of the pastor may seem to render preferable.—But there are a number of established principles to be kept in view in connexion with this general statement.

(1) Some allowance is to be made for the natural character, and for the merely mental qualifications of the individual. If, for instance, he be very ignorant or very diffident, it is not always to be expected, that his statements will be so consistent and satisfactory, as they might otherwise be. A candid construction is to be put upon his narrative, taking into view all the peculiarities of his situation. Indeed the church, in view of the circumstances alluded to or of others of a kindred character, may deem it advisable in some cases to satisfy themselves by a private rather than a public examination. And this may be done either directly by the private members of the church themselves, or indirectly through the inqui-

ties of the deacons or the minister, or by availing themselves of both these resources.

(2) Although the churches, in addition to strictly scriptural belief, universally consider holiness of character, or what is otherwise termed conversion, to be a prerequisite to full communion, still the exact time and manner of it are not required to be specified. The ways of God's working in the hearts of men are various, and the inquiry before the church is rather, whether there be grace in the heart, than how it came there. "I was once, (says the pious Baxter,) in a meeting of christians as eminent for holiness as most in the land, of whom diverse were ministers of great fame; and it was desired, that every one should give an account of the manner and time of his conversion, and there was but *one* of them all, that could do it. And I aver from my heart, (he adds in respect to himself,) that I neither know the year nor the day, when I began to be sincere."

The great point is to introduce into the church such as the Scriptures intended, and to exclude none of that character. And the particular manner, in which this important result is to be secured, has ever been considered as of less consequence, than the result itself. At any rate, nothing ought to be done which will tend to defeat it. Neither the manner, nor the principles of the examination should be such as to deprive any true follower of Christ of the privileges, which he designed for his children.—"As for this or that mode, (says Dr. Increase Mather,) in examining of persons, that offer themselves to be communicants in our churches, whether it shall be by a more continued relation of the work of grace in their hearts, or by questions and answers, (as was practised in the church at Hartford in Mr. Hooker's time, and which may possibly be as edifying a way as the for-

mer,) or whether the persons, designing to partake in the Lord's supper, shall declare their experiences orally, or in writing, are *prudentials*, which our Lord has left unto churches to determine, as they shall find most expedient for their own edification. Nevertheless the SUBSTANCE of the thing, (viz. either a relation, as 'tis called, or an equivalent,) ought to be insisted on."\*

### § 53. *Grounds or reasons of the foregoing practice.*

Some objections were made, in the beginnings of our ecclesiastical polity, to this practice, and the consequence was, that it was subjected, as has happened in other cases, to a serious and critical inquiry; and the sense of the churches was expressed in various ways in regard to it. (1) It was defended, in the first place, on the ground of Scripture. "Time was, (says Increase Mather in the Epistle referred to in the last Section,)

---

\* See Dr. Increase Mather's Epistle to the Church in Cambridge, Mass. prefixed to Cotton Mather's Life of Mitchel in the *Magnalia*. The sentiments of the Churches on this subject are also declared in the Work, entitled, *Church Government and Covenant*, Discussed in answer to XXXII Questions, Qs. viii.; in the Platform at Chapter xii. §§ 4, 5; and in Mather's *Historical Remarks*, *Magnalia*, Bk. V. § 6.

#### † INCREASE MATHER.

Congregationalists justly look back upon Increase Mather with such feelings of grateful veneration, as they are wont to associate with the memories of Robinson and Owen, of Hooker and Cotton. He was truly a venerable name; a man to be beloved; a light in literature and religion. If he did less than those, who have been mentioned, in fixing the landmarks of the system, he has the high praise of scrupulously watching them, and keeping them in their place, the greater part of a century. He was for a number of years the president of Harvard College; he sustained the office of minister sixty-two years; and closed his laborious and useful life at Boston, in August of 1723, in the eighty-fifth year of his age.

Beside numerous publications, which had no particular relation to the government and discipline of the churches, he

when the churches in New England believed, there was clear Scripture proof for the practice we plead for ; particularly that Scripture, Psal. xl. 10 ; *I have not hidden thy righteousness from the great congregation* ; and that Psal. lxvi. 16 ; *Come and hear all ye, that fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul.* And that Scripture, 1st Pet. iii. 15 ; *Be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asks you a reason of the hope, that is in you,* does by just consequence intimate as much as we assert."—See also the Platform, Chapt. xii.

(2) And, in the second place, the practice is in agreement with what was done in primitive times. When it was first introduced and insisted on by the Congregationalists, it was even then no new thing, as some seemed to suppose. Justin Martyr, who lived an hundred and fifty years after Christ, says, in his Second Apology for the Christians, That they examined such as were admitted to their communion, whether they were able to conform themselves in all things to the word and will of God. The language of Cyprian, in his third Epistle, is, **MIHI LABOR EST PERSUADERE FRATRIBUS UT RECIPIENDIS CONSENTIANT, VIX PLEBI PERSUADEO, UT TALES PATIANTUR ADMITTI ; QUI NEC CUM VERA PENITENTIA VENERANT** ; as much as to say, he found it difficult to persuade the brethren of the churches to consent to the admission of persons to their communion, provided they had any suspi-

---

wrote a work, entitled, *The First Principles of New England, a Discourse concerning the subject of Baptism and the Communion of Churches*, printed 1675; *Renewal of Covenant, the duty of Decaying and Distressed Churches*, printed 1677. *A Dissertation concerning Rights to Sacraments*, 1706; *A Dissertation wherein the Strange Doctrine of Mr. Stoddard is refuted*, 1708; *A Disquisition concerning Ecclesiastical Councils*, 1716; *A Testimony to the Order of the Churches*, 1720.—He was a member of the Synod of 1679, and drew up the Result of that Synod and the Preface to it.

cion of their offering themselves without true repentance.

(3) And, furthermore, this practice, so clearly sanctioned by the Scriptures and the primitive churches, is obviously agreeable to reason. It is necessary, in accordance with clear and admitted principles, that the churches be composed of persons of a particular character ; and the question is, How is this character to be ascertained ? Certainly the only way is, by means of some examination or trial. The method of this trial may slightly vary at times, according to circumstances ; but as the religious character of the church members is an indispensable point, and as this result cannot be otherwise secured, it follows, that the trial, in some form or other, must be had. And a statement or narration of personal religious experience, made in the presence of the whole church, upon which all the members can act, is one of the most obvious and effectual, and we may add, in general, one of the most unexceptionable means, which can be resorted to, as subordinate to such trial.

#### § 54. *Examination of persons coming from other churches.*

It has been made a question, Whether a person, coming from another Congregational church, which is in regular standing, ought to be subjected to a formal examination by the church, to which he comes recommended ? It has been thought by some, that the insisting on such an examination would imply a distrust of the distant church, and would necessarily be attended with unpleasant consequences. All, that can be said on this point, seems to be this, the church, to whom the individual is recommended, retains the right of examination; even of the strictest examination, if it see fit to exercise it. The possession of the right is so essential to its purity, that it cannot be safely given up, and never has been.

Still it is not necessary, that this right should always be enforced. If the character of the individual be known, or if the character of the church, from which he comes, be fully known, it is perhaps better, in general, to admit him without a formal examination, because such a course naturally tends to promote confidence and harmony. But if there be doubts in respect to either, it is the duty of the church, to which the testimonials or letters of recommendation are sent, to exercise caution, and to make such inquiries as shall at least secure itself from danger.

This seems to be essentially the doctrine of the Cambridge Platform, Chap. xii. § 6, viz. That each church possesses the right of instituting an examination under the circumstances mentioned, but that the exercise of this right may depend upon their discretion.—Its language is as follows ; “ This profession of faith and repentance, as it must be made by such at their admission, that were never in church society before ; so nothing hindereth, but the same may also be performed by such as have formerly been members of some other church, Matt. iii. 5, 6 ; Gal. ii. 4 ; first Tim. v. 24. And the church, to which they now join themselves as members, may lawfully require the same. Those three thousand, Acts 2d, which made their confession, were members of the church of the Jews before ; so were those, that were baptized by John,” &c.

#### § 55. *Of admissions in reference to the right of voting.*

Whether the applicant shall be admitted or not, after having undergone such examination as was requisite, will depend upon the choice or opinion of the church, as expressed by a vote. It is true, they have no right to refuse admission to any sincere follower of Christ, who does not hesitate to assent to the Confession and Cove-

nant of the church ; but they have a right to judge, according to the evidence before them and by the aid of the word of God, whether he be such a follower or not. And their judgment or opinion on this point seems to be what is chiefly expressed by the vote given.

By the practice of the churches, and for various obvious reasons, the opinion, expressed by the majority of votes, is considered to be the opinion of the whole. Perhaps the decisions of the majority may sometimes be wrong ; but it seems to be clearly necessary to admit, and abide by the principle, that the majority shall rule in all cases of a merely advisory, prudential, or disciplinary nature ; otherwise there would often be great indecision and confusion. All the members of a church have an equal right to express their opinions and vote, excepting females, who do neither. The practice of the churches, in excluding females from debating and voting, is founded on Scripture, (1st Cor. xiv. 33, 34, 1st Tim. ii. 11,) and on its expediency and propriety, although they are at times able to exert indirectly a salutary influence. The vote of a minister counts no more than that of a private member ; and commonly, in consequence of being moderator of church meetings for business, he does not vote at all, except the members be equally divided. But this practice, which seems naturally to result from his situation, would not justify him in withholding his opinion, especially in any matter of importance.\*

---

\* In the **ECCLESIASTICA METHERMENEUTICA** or Church Cases Cleared, which was published in 1652, by Mr. D. N. Homes of Mary-Staynings, London, we find the subject of Voting taken up, and considered at Question XI. The writer earnestly objects to church affairs being determined by the majority merely. He asserts, that the majority will sometimes be ignorant or prejudiced, and still they have the power to govern the minority, who are more enlightened, and are perhaps very nearly equal in numbers. Some churches of Christ, he reminds us, both primitive and modern, never passed a vote, ex-

§ 56. *Propounding and the concluding ceremony at admitting.*

The church, having voted to admit a person or persons, they are PROPOUNDED; that is, their names are mentioned in the presence of the whole congregation on the Sabbath; and generally two or three weeks before the time of admission. The object of this is, to give any, who choose, an opportunity to make objections; a practice, which both tends to the satisfaction of the people at large, and also to the purity of the church itself. When the day of admission arrives, which is generally some Communion Sabbath, the Confession of Faith, (see § 35,) is read to the persons propounded, and in presence of the whole congregation. If any of the persons, who have now assented to the Confession, have never been baptized, this solemn ceremony next takes place. The Church Covenant is then read, to which they all in like manner give some visible sign of assent. The pastor then, (without any renewal of vote on the part of the church, which was once customary, though not at present generally practised,) says to the persons concerned the following words or to this effect;

(*Declaration to those who are received;*)

We then receive you to the fellowship of this Church, promising to conduct towards you, and to watch over you, with Christian affection; praying that you and we may at last be presented faultless before our Lord with exceeding joy.

---

cept the voters were unanimous on the question. And this seems to be his view of the proper method of proceeding, viz. that all must think alike before coming to a decision. But on this plan the same difficulty which he refers to, exists, and in greater force; since an ignorant and prejudiced *minority*, and that too of even *one* person, may justly be said in many cases, not only to perplex, but to govern all the rest.

## CHAPTER SIXTH.

## CHOICE AND CALL OF A PASTOR.

**§ 57. *Of the internal or personal call of a minister.***

No person is at liberty, it is often remarked, to assume the office of a minister, but such as are *called of God*. The sentiment must be regarded as correct, when it is rightly understood; nor is it to be doubted, that it is one of much practical importance. Certainly an office, involving such immense interests, ought not to be entered on with that lightness of heart and want of consideration, which are sometimes excusable in other circumstances. But when it is said, that ministers are called of God, What is truly to be understood by that assertion? Certainly not, that they are immediately or miraculously called, as was the case with the prophets and apostles; but rather that there is in all cases a divine call to the ministry, whenever God clearly makes it the duty of a person to enter on that office. And in determining this point, men are to reason from their own characters and feelings, from the Scriptures, and from the situation of the world, much as they would in other circumstances; and not to wait for a specific and personal revelation from God on the subject.

"How beautiful are the feet of them, that preach the Gospel of peace, that bring glad tidings of good things!" The world is represented by the Saviour himself, as a great field, already white for the harvest. What then is requisite in those, who shall be called BEAUTIFUL, the dispensers of glad tidings of good things? Without pretending to set up an infallible criterion, it may be safely

said, that we may at least expect to find in such persons a holy and blameless conduct, having its origin and support in a humbled, penitent, and believing heart. We may also expect to find in them a strong and permanent inclination and desire to do good ; a willingness to labor for the conversion and upbuilding of souls for Christ's sake, and not for their own. And in addition to these obvious requisites, they should possess abilities, suited to the work, such as knowledge, firmness of purpose, aptness to teach, and the like.

And we may well suppose that God now, as in former times, addresses himself to persons, possessing such mental and moral qualifications, saying, "The fields are already white. The laborers are few." We may, with the utmost reason, regard Him as inviting their co-operation, as pointing to the scene of labor, and promising success.—Such is the call, on which the individual is to act, who looks forward to the great work of the ministry ; this is the commission given him, and there can be no higher one.

### § 58. *External call, or call from the church.*

But such is the constitution of society, that, in a Christian country at least, it becomes necessary for the Christian public to judge, as well as the individual himself, of the particular application of his powers. Hence the necessity of an external call, or a call from some church, if it be his expectation and desire to limit his exertions chiefly to some select part of the great field of labor. Nor is this state of things in general unfavorable to the prompt exercise of his wisdom and talents in this good cause, since no church is willing to remain long without a minister, if it be able to obtain one; an event, to which its members look forward with solicitude and watchfulness.

ness, and particularly with prayer to that ascended Redeemer, who imparts to men such gifts, as are requisite in the pastoral office.

Accordingly the first positive step, taken by the church, towards supplying their ministerial wants, is, to ascertain and employ some one, possessed of the qualifications, which have been mentioned, and who has been regularly licensed by one of the clerical Associations in the country; or perhaps has already been settled in some other place, and subsequently removed. This preliminary movement is commonly made by the church and society conjointly, through the medium of a committee, the members of which are chosen from both. After suitable opportunities for forming a judgment of the candidate's character and ministerial qualifications, the church, if they are satisfied, express their satisfaction by a vote, and their desire to enjoy the services of the individual as their minister. In other words, they give the candidate what is termed a Call; that is, a formal invitation or request to settle. But before making it known to the individual, they proceed also to communicate by vote their feelings and desires to the Society or Congregation, and to request, that they would join with the church in the measure they have taken; the church and society proceeding in the affair of settling a minister in a manner somewhat similar to that of the two houses of our legislatures in civil affairs. The church, then, it will be noticed, takes the lead of the society or Parish in this important choice.

§ 59. *Precedence of the church in the call of a minister, and grounds of it.*

Whether right or wrong in the view of others, it is abundantly evident from various sources, not only that

this is a principle of Congregationalism, but that it is to be regarded as one of the distinguishing features of their system. Nevertheless the principle seems to have been objected to by certain of the Congregationalists themselves more than an hundred years ago, as we learn from the **RATIO FRATRUM Nov-ANGLORUM**. The statement or argument of these dissatisfied persons may be summed up in these two propositions ; That the Society or Congregation support the minister equally with the church, sometimes even assuming the greater share of the burden ; and that, consequently, it is unjust to allow the church a precedence over the society. Hence it may tend to the satisfaction of some to state some of the grounds, on which the principle rests.—These grounds are three-fold, viz. Natural right ; Scriptural authority and example ; And the purity of the ministry.

§ 60. *Church precedency in the call of a minister a Natural Right.*

It is hardly necessary to remark here after what has been already said, (§ § 9, 11, 25,) that the Scriptures make a distinction between the church and congregation. We read of a church being selected or gathered out of a great multitude, who were present, Acts viii. 12 ; of Paul separating his disciples from the multitude, Acts xix. 9 ; of unbelievers being joined in outward worship with believers, 1st Cor. xiv. 23 ; &c. Such passages show, that the believers or separates formed one class, and that the multitude or unbelievers formed another.

Admitting, then, that the churches of Christ always have been, and from the nature of the case, ought to be, distinct from the multitude or mass of people, it would seem evidently to follow, that they are entitled, from nature and by the will of God, to those rights, which are in-

cident to, and grow out of this separation. They separate from the rest of the world for the purpose of mutual religious instruction, of doing the will of Christ, and of enjoying his ordinances, such as Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The union, which they form, is voluntary, and does not interfere with the rights or privileges of others. And it cannot be denied by any person, who has correct notions of the foundations of human freedom, that these voluntary associations have the same right, as other similar associations, to choose the officers, which are necessary to secure the objects of their union. It is, as much a natural and unalienable right, as any that can be named.—But it will at once be said here, although the church have a right to choose their own officers, they have no right to impose or force their officers on the Society. This is a point, on which it will be necessary to remark before closing this subject.

#### § 61. *Founded also on Scripture authority and example.*

The churches plead also in defence of taking the precedence in the choice of officers, that they are warranted in so doing by Scripture authority and example. For instance, we read in Acts i. 14—26, that on a certain occasion the disciples of Christ were assembled together. The number of them is specified; they were about an hundred and twenty. This select body, this primitive church acted in the choice of a person to supply the vacancy, occasioned by the death of Judas Iscariot; and this too in the presence of the Apostle Peter.—At Acts vi. 3—7, we find the church of Jerusalem assembled again, and exercising the power in question in the choice of Prochorus, Nicanor, and others to the office of deacon.

The exercise of the power under consideration by the churches in the Apostolic age may be inferred also from Acts xiv. 23. This, it is true, is not obvious from the English translation, as it now stands; but the original of the word, **ORDAINED**, is the Greek participle, **CHEIROTONESANTES**, which implies, that the selection or choice of persons to the Eldership was made by the vote of the body of the disciples, [i. e. by the church,] and not directly by the Apostles.—All these passages are referred to in the Platform. The language of that instrument, ch. X. § 5. is; “Officers are to be called by such churches, whereunto they are to minister. Of such moment is the preservation of this power, that the churches exercised it in the presence of the Apostles, Acts i. 23, vi. 3—5, xiv. 23.”

§ 62. *Necessary to the maintenance of purity in the ministry.*

And there are other considerations, having a connection with the rights or privileges of the churches, which we are attending to.—The framers of the Congregational System were inexpressibly anxious, that the ministry should be pure, devoted, holy. They well knew it to be the design and will of Christ, that his ministers should possess this character; and they were accordingly desirous, that no ecclesiastical regulations should be introduced but such as would tend to promote these great and merciful intentions of the Redeemer. Animated with such sentiments, ardently desirous of seeing the spread of true religion, it was impossible for them to abandon the principle, that the churches have a right to choose their own officers, and that it is their duty to do it. Among multitudes of decisive authorities on the subject before us, take the following striking passage from

the **RATIO DISCIPLINE** of Cotton Mather, who had as ample opportunities, as any man that ever lived, to ascertain the landmarks and the true spirit of Congregationalism.

"A body of Christians," he says, "associated for all the ordinances of the Gospel, are a church of our glorious Lord, which have among other precious privileges a Right from him to choose their own pastors. The churches, which have recovered the exercise of this right from the oppression of man, under which many churches of the Reformation are to this day groaning, ought to keep the precepts and the favors of the Lord, and not easily part with what he has given them."

"To introduce a practice, [that of allowing Parishes a precedence over the church,] in the choice of a pastor, which, being followed, may soon bring a pastor to be chosen for a church, which few, yea, *none* of the church have ever voted for, would be to betray and even destroy a most valuable right, that such a Society, [i. e. church,] have a claim unto, and many evil consequences are to be expected from it." **RAT. Disc. Nov-ANGL.**  
**ART. I.**—The evil consequences, alluded to, undoubtedly are, the introduction in a short time of a corrupt ministry; the subsequent corruption of the churches; and in this way the ultimate ruin of both. That such consequences would follow is obvious, when we remember the depravity of the human heart, and when we take into account, that multitudes are fond of having moral teachers, whose practice at least is as wanting in strictness and purity, as their own.

§ 63. *The Church has no coercive power over the Parish.*

It will no doubt be said, that the church, although they

have a right to choose their own officers, have no right to impose or force their officers on the Congregation or Parish. This is granted. They neither possess, nor assume such a right. And this is so obvious as to render a particular consideration of this point unnecessary.

*§ 64. Grounds of the reference of the choice to the Society or Parish.*

Still it is important, that the Church and Parish should act together; that they should meet together in the same place of worship; and share mutually in certain of the benefits, connected with the ministry. The church is to be increased from time to time by members taken from the parish. Their interests are not diverse, although their situation is different.—And hence the great problem to be solved was, How a minister should be chosen, in the choice of whom the Parish should have a voice, and still the rights and purity of the churches be suitably attended to and secured? And the solution, which Congregationalists have given, (the only one which they could give,) is this; The Church make a choice in the first instance; this choice they notify to the Parish and invite them to concur; if the Parish do not concur, they choose again, and invite a concurrence as before; in some cases, repeating the process, in a spirit of conciliation, a number of times.\*

---

\* The remarkable assertion has been made in quarters, entitling it to attention, that the distinction, which has been drawn between the rights and duties of Churches and Parishes, did not formerly exist, at least in practice; and is not supported by ancient Congregational authorities. The incorrectness of that declaration will be manifest to any one, who carefully examines and weighs the passages referred to in the following works; Neal's History of the Puritans, Pt. II. ch. 2; Bartlet's Model of the Primitive Congregational Way, ch. II.; Richard Mather's Church Government and Church Covenant Discussed in an Answer of the Elders of the Churches in

*§ 65. The concurrent action of the two. a matter of agreement.*

The system, then, is one of mutual agreement and concession. No tyranny is exercised by the church; and no despotism is endured by the parish; but the rights and duties of the Christian are joined in harmony with the rights and interests of the man. The church are true to the Saviour in being true to what he has committed to them; while, at the same time, the claims of the Congregation are equitably considered and adjusted.

The ultimate good of the Parish, it should be remembered, is coincident with that of the church, whatever the difference in their present situation. And it may be safely

New England to XXXII Questions, Qss. I. II. VIII.; An Answer, (ascribed to the same writer,) of the Elders of the several Churches in New England to Nine Positions, &c. IV. V.; Adam's Annals of Portsmouth, year 1670; Cotton's Way of the Churches of Christ in New England, ch. iii. §§ 1, 2; Emerson's History of the First Church in Boston, Sects. I. II.; Morton's Memorial, p. 17, Davis' Ed.; Hooker's Survey of the Sum of Church Discipline, pp. 13, 14; Mass. Historical Collections, Vol. II. 2d Series, Art. XII.; Cam. Platform, Chs. III. IV. VIII.; Winthrop, vol. I. p. 94, Savage's Ed. Note 2; Increase Mather's Letter to the Church at Cambridge, prefixed to Cotton Mather's Life of Mitchel; Testimony of the Saine to Good Order in the Churches of the Faithful, Case II.; Owen's Inquiry into the Original, &c. of Churches, Chs. I—IV.; Rat. Disciplinæ Nov-Anglorum, Art. II.—From these passages and multitudes of others, which might be referred to, it is evident, that the early churches in New England were select bodies; that the members of them were persons, possessing certain moral and religious characteristics, which were well understood; that they were generally bound together, and separated from the mass of the people by an express covenant; that they exercised certain powers, such as the choosing or the excluding of members, and the appointing of officers, &c. In a word, they will be found to be such as we have represented them; bodies entirely distinct from the Parishes, although meeting together in the same places of worship, and sometimes exercising their powers conjointly.

said, that the plan, which has been adopted, is as beneficial to the former as to the latter. At any rate, it cannot be altered by any further concessions on the part of the churches to the parishes. Such concessions would be inconsistent with that sense of duty, which ought to be the ultimate law of men's conduct. However it might be approved by the wicked world at large, it would be condemned by the tone and spirit of the whole Congregational history, as utter ingratitude and treachery to the Saviour.

### § 66. *Of the support of the minister.*

If the church and parish, pursuing the course, which has been mentioned, agree upon a person to be settled as a minister, the CALL is transmitted to the candidate or pastor elect ; the concurrence of the Parish being at the same time made known. Arrangements are also made by the church in connection with the parish for his support ; the terms of which are formally stated to the pastor elect at the same time with the communication of his Call.—On the subject of supporting the ministry, the following sentiments are found in the Platform, at chapter XI. § 1.

“ The Apostle concludes, that necessary and sufficient maintenance is due unto the ministers of the word from the law of nature and nations, from the law of Moses, the equity thereof, as also the rule of common reason. Moreover the Scripture doth not only call elders laborers and workmen, Gal. vi. 6 ; but also speaking of them doth say, that the laborer is worthy of his hire, 1st Cor. ix. 9, xiv. 1, 1st Tim. v. 18 ; and requires, that he, which is taught in the word, should communicate in all good things, and mentions it as an ordinance of the Lord, that they, which preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel,

and forbiddeth the muzzling of the ox, that treadeth out the corn."

In a subsequent section of that chapter, it is stated to be the duty of the magistrate, [civil magistrate,] to see, that the ministry be duly provided for, in case other resources fail. On this subject the sentiment of the churches at the present day is different from what it seems to have been in the time of our pious fathers. All resort to the civil power in support of religious institutions is dis-countenanced. The whole history of the world shows us, that the civil power is as likely to aid false, as true religion. True religion will support itself ; it bears in its own bosom the principle of universal dissemination ; a mightier power, than belongs to earth, is pledged in its behalf. And, therefore, the sooner the disruption of secular authority and of religion shall be effected in all parts of the world, the better will it be for the cause of Christ.

#### § 67. *Of the form of the invitation or Call.*

There is not, as among some other Christian denominations, a prescribed form for the Call ; the churches being left to their own good sense and pious feelings. It is common, however, to say something in that instrument of the situation and wants of the church ; of the probationary services of the candidate and their acquaintance with him ; of their satisfaction with his moral and religious qualifications. And in view thereof they call and invite, or request him, to settle in the Gospel ministry, and undertake the pastoral care and charge of the church, &c.

But whatever be the express terms of the CALL, it is requisite, that it be drawn up with some explicitness and care, as it passes, together with the Answer to the same, under the examination of the Ordaining Council, and often has an important bearing on its proceedings.

## CHAPTER SEVENTH.

## ORDINATION OF THE PASTOR.

*§ 68. Of the necessity and authority of ordination.*

Previous to Ordination, the candidate for settlement is not permitted, by the Usages of the Congregational churches, to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Nor is it customary for him to repeat the benediction of the Apostle, (2d Cor. xiii. 14,) with which the public religious services commonly close; but he uses some other, and generally a more concise form of dismissal. If the candidate, (and the same will hold good in respect to any mere licentiate,) were not excluded from the performance of certain duties, and kept, as it were, in check, he might sometimes be led to regard the further steps, which are implied in ordination, as unnecessary, and even to assume the responsibility of positively refusing them. In this manner it would be possible for unworthy persons to find their way into the field of labor in the character of ministers, notwithstanding the utmost care of the clerical Associations, by which they were licensed to preach, and of the particular churches, by which they were elected as pastors.

In view of these remarks, it seems to be obvious, that the practice of Ordination is very needful, as one means of maintaining a suitable ability and purity of character in the ministry. In a mere prudential point of view, the good of the churches and of the cause of religion, which is intimately connected with the character of the ministry, seems imperatively to require it. But further than this, ordination is abundantly authorised and required in

the Scriptures. It was performed in the primitive ages of the Christian church; in the times and in the presence of the Apostles themselves, Acts vi. 6, xiii. 3, xix. 23. 1st Tim. v. 22. And if it be a duty to follow the example of the faithful Apostles in any case, it would be difficult to show, that it is not in this.

§ 69. *Of the meaning and comparative importance of ordination.*

It seems to be a principle of Congregationalists, that the constituting of a minister, (taking the words in the fullest sense,) lays, under God, with the church; and not with any other body of men. They consider the greatest and most decisive act in the process of introducing a person into the ministry to be his choice or election to the pastoral office by a particular church. However important the ceremony of ordination may be, considered as a check on a premature choice by the church, or as being called for and authorised by the Scriptures, they are very express in regarding it as something less than Election. The following expressions are found in the Platform, (Chap. IX. § 2,) having relation to its meaning and its importance.

"This ORDINATION, Numb. viii. 10, Acts vi. 5, 6, xiii. 2, 3, we account nothing else, but the solemn putting a man into his place and office in the church, whereunto he had right before by election, *being like the installing of a magistrate in the commonwealth.* Ordination, therefore, is not to go before, but to follow election, Acts vi. 5, 6, xiv. 23. The essence and substance of the outward calling of an ordinary officer in the church does not consist in his ordination, but in his voluntary and free election by the church and his accepting of that election."

Nevertheless, Ordination, as we have before suffi-

ciently seen, is an important step in the process of introducing a person into the pastoral office, although it may be less so, than the election by the church, and the acceptance on the part of the person chosen. The method of ordaining seems to have slightly varied from time to time; but it has ever been judged inconsistent with a due regard to the Scriptures and the interests of the churches, that the thing itself should be omitted.

*§ 70. Remarks on the early practice of the churches.*

It may perhaps be proper to remark here, that, in the early history of the country, it was sometimes the practice for each church to ordain its own newly chosen ministers within itself.\* And it is evident, this course was in some respects more practicable then, than at the present day, since there were ordinarily two ministers to each church, viz. a teaching and a pastoral elder, besides ruling elders; all of whom had experienced the imposition of hands, and formed a sort of church sessions, or **PRESBYTERY**, as they were sometimes termed, of a particular church. It appears in a few instances, where it was found particularly convenient or necessary, that lay-members were appointed to assist on such occasions; and this is expressly permitted in the Platform.

*§ 71. Representative or delegated nature of ordaining councils.*

This practice, which wears a somewhat singular appearance to their descendants, seems to have been found-

---

\* In reference to this point, see Emerson's History of the First Church in Boston, pp. 11, 17, compared with Winthrop's History of New England, Savage's Ed. p. 96; Trumbull's History of Connecticut, Vol. I. chap. xiii.; Mass. Historical Collections, 2d Series, Vol. III. p. 276; Cotton's Way of the Churches in New England, chap. ii. § 3; Samuel Mather's Apology for the Churches, p. 53; Platform, chap. ix.

ed on a principle, which was scrupulously cherished by our forefathers, and the abandonment of which they probably could not have anticipated without pain. The principle is this; The choice or election of a minister is a greater act than his ordination, and, consequently, the church, which may perform the greater, is competent also to perform the less, there being no satisfactory scripture testimony to the contrary. "If the people, (says the Platform, ch. ix.) may elect officers, which is the greater, and wherein the substance of the office may consist, they may much more, (need and occasion so requiring,) impose hands in Ordination, which is less, and but the accomplishment of the other."—See also a particular defence of this principle, and the answers, given to objectors to it, in Cotton's Way of the Churches of New-England, ch. II. §§ 8, 9.

The principle, that it is the right and duty of the Church, which elects a minister, to ordain him, is thought to hold good, or, in other words, to be generally admitted at the present day. But in point of practice, there is this very considerable difference; the churches at the present time do not ordain directly of themselves, but indirectly through the agency of the pastors and delegates of the neighboring churches. The practice is settled; and a deviation from it, by recurring to the ancient method, which evidently originated in part in the peculiar circumstances of the times, would be considered highly objectionable.

If these statements are correct, the members of Ordaining Councils must be regarded essentially in the light of representatives or commissioners of their particular churches; nevertheless they are accountable to Christ, who is the head and ruler of all his followers, for the faithful discharge of their duty. The neighboring

churches, met together by their agents, examine the testimonials of the candidate, and the proceedings, which have been had in reference to his settlement ; and do all other things, which are authorized and requisite on the occasion.

By means of this well digested and judicious plan, the churches secure their own rights ; they effectually consult the wisdom and wishes of sister churches, as they are bound to do by one of their acknowledged principles ; and at the same time they greatly promote the peace, order, and purity of the ministry. And such being both the principle and the long-established practice, it falls to each particular church, previous to the ordination of the person, whom it has elected, to send LETTERS MISSIVE to a select number of neighboring churches, inviting them to meet at a particular time and place by means of their pastors and delegates, in order to counsel and aid in that solemn proceeding.\*

\* The LETTER MISSIVE, which is sent on these occasions, is usually in some such form as this, and to the following purport:

R——, Jan. 2, 1828.  
*The Church [or Congregational Church] in R——,  
To the Congregational Church in D——,*  
Send Greeting.

*Beloved Brethren ;*  
*Through the goodness of our blessed Saviour, we have been  
permitted to extend an invitation and call to Mr. ——, to  
settle with us in the work of the Gospel Ministry. He has  
seen cause to accept our invitation. In accordance, therefore,  
with Congregational usage, we request, that you will meet in  
Council, by your Rev. Pastor and delegates, and advise and  
assist in the solemnities of his Ordination ; which is appoint-  
ed to take place on the —— day of February next, &c.*

*Wishing you grace, mercy, and peace from God, the Father,  
and our Lord, Jesus Christ, we remain your Brethren in the  
faith and fellowship of the Gospel.*

[The particular place and the hour of assembling, and the  
other churches sent to are made known in the Letter Missive.]

§ 72. *Reasons for calling the neighboring churches to the Council.*

The majority of the churches assembled are neighboring churches. It would indeed answer the mere letter of the great general principle, that Congregational churches are not INDEPENDENT, but are bound to hold communion with each other, if any Congregational churches whatever should be called in on such occasions. But it is altogether expedient, and desirable, and has ever been the practice, to select the major part of the Council from the churches in the near vicinity, and not to go to a distance.

The reason of this is obvious.—The churches, which are in near vicinity, are better acquainted with each other's situation and interests; they cherish reciprocally a deeper regard; and hence are generally more prepared to act in the important case of an Ordination with promptness, wisdom, and thorough investigation, than distant churches. In ordinary cases, therefore, (for some cases of peculiar difficulty may sometimes occur, forming an exception,) it would be unwise to pass them over, and to call in strangers, even though they were governed by the same ecclesiastical principles, and bore the same name. Besides involving an abandonment of those advantages, which have been mentioned, it would be followed by the positive and serious evil of weakening the friendship and love of those, who are required by their situation frequently to meet, and to consult together on the interests of Zion.

§ 73. *Of the admission of lay-members as delegates.*

In the LETTERS MISSIVE the churches are commonly invited to attend by their Pastors and Delegates. If they accept of the invitation, the pastor is chosen of course,

without any further vote. Nevertheless, the minister is as much a delegate or commissioner of his particular church, as the lay-member, notwithstanding this peculiarity in the phraseology of the Letter Missive, and the difference in the mode of choice.

It was almost a matter of course, that the pastor should be invited as one of the representatives of the church; the Letter Missive takes it for granted, that the church sent to desires and chooses to be represented by its pastor; but it has always been the practice to invite the attendance of one or more lay-members at the same time.

If the principles, already laid down, be correctly stated, then it follows, that the election of lay-members does not alter the nature of the Council, which is essentially representative; and would be so, if there were none but ministers present. The practice, however, which prevails, has ever been highly approved; although their presence may neither alter the nature, nor add to the ability of the assembled body. The practice at least affords an occasion to the lay-members of different churches to form an acquaintance with each other and with the pastors; it leads them to reflection and examination in respect to the principles of church-union and government; and presents an opportunity for the exercise of their prudence and christian feelings. And besides, it was no doubt supposed by the framers of our church constitution, that the attendance of lay delegates at such times, would operate as a check on any tendencies to clerical domination, if such should exhibit themselves.

#### § 74. *Preparatory proceedings of the Council.*

The members of the Council meet at the place appointed. Being called to order by some one of the more

aged of their number, who reads the Letter Missive as the foundation of their proceedings, they are organized by the choice of a Moderator and a Scribe. After supplications at the throne of grace, they enter on the business, in respect to which they have been called together. There appears to be no fixed and invariable method in the proceedings of the Council, although the great objects and results are usually the same.

They inquire, however, as a matter of course, for all the papers, which concern the church standing and the proposed ordination of the candidate, viz. the Certificate of church membership, the License to preach, the Call by the church, the Answer to the same, &c. In reference to these papers, if they are found to be satisfactory, it is customary to take a formal vote, That the proceedings of the church and society, and the Answer of the candidate to the Call to settle, are according to Congregational Usage. And this is very proper, because, if there be no evidence of any kind of church membership, or of a License to preach, or of a Call to settle and an Answer to the same, Congregational Usage would render any further proceedings inadmissible. No Council would assume the responsibility of proceeding under such circumstances.

#### § 75. *Further proceedings of the Council.*

The Council are not expected by the church, that convenes them, nor would they be permitted by the duty they owe to the Saviour, to limit themselves to the mere ascertainment of regularity in the forms of proceeding. Something more is incumbent on them. It is their duty to inquire, as far as may be necessary for their satisfaction, in respect to the literary and moral qualifications of the candidate; particularly his theological knowledge,

his personal religious experience, and the motives, which lead him to the undertaking of a work so arduous. It is incumbent on them likewise, to attend to any objections, which may be made to the candidate from any quarter. Whatever objections are to be proposed, ought evidently to be made during the preparatory deliberations of the Council ; and not after proceeding to the religious exercises.

If every thing be found satisfactory, the Council vote to proceed to the Ordination, and this involves the assignment to individuals of the public religious performances, which are customary on these occasions ; but it is not common, (and for obvious reasons,) to assign any parts to the lay-members.—The Charge, which from its nature seems to require the experience and the confirmed piety of age, is commonly assigned to the eldest minister on the Council ; and the Right Hand of Fellowship to the youngest, or the one most recently settled in the near vicinity. But the practice in respect to both of these parts is sometimes varied from. The Ordination Sermon is generally pronounced by some individual, who has been previously designated to that duty by the church in connection with the candidate ; the Council concurring in this previous selection and making the assignment. There may be also, especially if it be their wish, an Address to the church and people.\*

---

\* **REMARKS.** (1) It was once the practice for the candidate himself to pronounce the Sermon ; see Prince's Sermon at his Ordination to the Pastoral Charge of the Boston South Church, Oct. 1st, 1718 ; Josiah Smith's Discourse at his Ordination at Boston, July 11, 1726, &c. The practice was judiciously dropped, "it being by some thought more decent for some elder divine to deliver such things as are most proper for the day," Mather's RAT. DISCIPLINE, Art. II. § 8.

(2) It appears also from a remark in the same work, that, in Mather's time, the Charge was usually assigned to a person, who had been previously selected by the church; the persons

**§ 76. *Of the ordaining prayer.***

The Council, having made the necessary antecedent arrangements, assemble, at the time appointed, in the meeting-house. The proceedings are then read before the assembly by the Scribe. The religious exercises, prayers, reading the Scriptures, and the Sermon, succeed each other as on the Sabbath; having, of course, a reference, (the Sermon in particular,) to the occasion. Then follows what is termed the Ordaining or Consecrating prayer; so called perhaps, because it has particular reference to the setting apart, or consecrating of the pastor elect to the great work before him.

The suppliant acknowledges the glories of the enthroned Jesus, and the many mercies, which have been shown to the church by her Prophet, Priest, and King. He celebrates the goodness of God, as manifested on the present occasion; and particularly petitions, that He would bless, guide, and accept his servant, who is now set apart, by prayer and the imposition of hands, to the holy and glorious work of Christ's ministry.

**§ 77. *Import of the imposition of hands.***

In the course of this prayer and in that part of it, which has particular relation to the setting apart of the individual to the ministerial work, the suppliant stretches forth also, who were to impose hands, were designated previously. But the ceremony of laying on hands has for many years been left wholly to the Council; and a long established common law seems to require the assignment of the Charge to the eldest minister, unless peculiar circumstances require a deviation from the general rule.

(3) The Scribe of the Council of course retains the minutes of its proceedings in his own possession. But it is for many reasons important, and is expected, that he will embrace an early opportunity to transmit an attested copy of them to the church, by which the Council was called.

his hand, and places it on the head of the subject of his petitions : other ministers of the Council, who are near, do the same. This solemn laying on of hands is a symbolical action ; that is to say, it is an action, to which the example of former times and long usage have given a meaning. As an inclination of the head in common conversation indicates assent, and the shaking of hands, when persons meet together in the intercourse of life, signifies good-will or friendship ; so the imposition of hands on these occasions is generally regarded as indicating *the setting apart* to some particular purpose.

Thus in the days of Moses, when the Israelite brought his victim to the door of the Tabernacle, he was required to lay his hand upon its head ; and it was not until the performance of this ceremony, that the victim was accepted as fully *set apart* for the sacrifice, Lev. i. 4. When the Levites were consecrated to the service of God, Moses brought them before the tabernacle of the congregation, in the presence of the whole assembly of the children of Israel. And the children of Israel laid their hands on the Levites, as a sign that they were offered, or set apart to the service of the Lord, Numb. viii. 5—11.

It is impossible to state precisely, at the present time, the origin, the first occasion of this symbolic ceremony ; it goes back very far into antiquity. Nevertheless, it was retained, and was frequently practised by the Apostles. It was received from them by their successors, and being sanctioned by such high authority, it has continued to form a part of ecclesiastical usages. (See the Magnalia, B. v. § 8, and Mather's Sermon on the Work of the Ministry.)

#### § 78. *Of the object and manner of the charge.*

The object of the charge seems to be to give such solemn advice, warning, and encouragement, as are suited

to the nature and difficulties of the ministerial work. Such was the Charge, given by the Apostle Paul to Timothy. This performance is of a grave and serious character, but concise; and as in the other exercises, there is no fixed and unalterable form of thought and expression, to be followed by the speaker. But in the old New England Brethrens' **RATIO DISCIPLINE**, where we have an express exemplification of its spirit and manner, it is said to be in such terms as these;

"Whereas You on whom, we now, to declare so much, do impose, [have imposed,] our hands, are called unto the work of the evangelical ministry in the church of the living God, and unto the office of a pastor in the particular church of the Lord, with which we are now assembled, we do now introduce you into that awful station.—We, therefore, CHARGE you before the great God and our Saviour, the glorious head of the church, that you *take heed unto the ministry*, which you have received from the Lord, plainly, and faithfully, and watchfully to fulfil it, and as one, that must give up an account unto Him; That you *feed the whole flock*, whereof you are now made an overseer, and therein study to show yourself approved of God, and a workman, that needs not to be ashamed; that you *pray without ceasing*, and give yourself to reading and meditation, and preach the word, instruct, reprove, exhort with all the long suffering, that becomes a servant of God;

That you administer the *Sacraments of the New Covenant*, as a wise and good steward of those heavenly mysteries; That you impartially *dispense the Discipline*, with which the house of the Lord is to be ordered, and his kingdom expressed and maintained, making a difference between the holy and profane; And that you be *an example of the believers* in your whole conversation, with all piety and charity, endeavoring to exhibit the gra-

ces of that Lord, unto whose peculiar service you are now devoted.

And, if You keep this CHARGE, *we declare unto You*, that the Lord of hosts will give you a place among his elect angels, who doubtless do now stand by as witnesses of the solemn action, wherein we are now engaged; witnesses to the bonds and vows of God, which you have now with all possible solemnity taken upon you. Yea, *we declare unto You*, that if you do this, When the Lord Jesus Christ shall appear, you shall appear with Him in glory. He, who is the chief Shepherd, will then give you a Crown of glory, which shall never fade away."

#### § 79. *Of giving the Right Hand of Fellowship.*

One reason of employing neighboring churches to perform, by their delegates and pastors, the acts of ordination, is, that it affords them a favorable opportunity to express their opinions and their good wishes in an important affair. It has ever been admitted, that it is the duty of the churches to consult each other in cases of great importance; and undoubtedly the settlement of a minister is one of these. A part of the exercises, therefore, (what is termed the Right Hand of Fellowship,) has reference to this principle; that is to say, it is designed to express publicly the concurrence and approval of the sister churches as to what has taken place; and their congratulations, and sincere and Christian welcome to the new Pastor.

For this religious performance, the propriety of which might be fully inferred from the expanding and communicative nature of Christian love, there is direct Scripture warrant. "*The Churches of Christ salute you,*" Rom. xvi. 16; "*And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace, that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the Right Hands of Fellowship,*" Gal. ii. 9.

§ 80. *Spirit of the Right Hand of Fellowship and closing services.*

The Speaker remarks upon the various causes, which combine men together, and then passes to the consideration of Christian love, the purest, noblest, and most permanent of all bonds of union. He adverts to the principle of Congregationalism, which recognizes the relationship of all the true churches of Christ, as members of one great family, of which Christ is the head; and to the attendant principle, that this mutual and near relationship ought to be publicly and distinctly acknowledged, on suitable occasions.

In the name, therefore, and by the appointment of the Council, he extends his hand to the new Pastor, the **RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP**.—He requests him to receive it, as a symbol, that the churches are one, united by a common hope, and bound together by a reciprocal desire for each other's spiritual advancement; and as an expression, that he is cordially and fully acknowledged as an authorized minister of the Gospel. To this public announcement of the brotherly union of the churches, and this solemn and fraternal acknowledgment of the new Pastor, are commonly joined sincere expressions of personal regard, hearty desires for his success in the ministerial work, and glowing anticipations of that unbounded bliss, which is reserved by Jesus Christ for all his faithful followers.

Then follows a prayer by some one of the Council; the concluding services alone, the reading a psalm or hymn, and the benediction, being reserved to the newly ordained minister.

§ 81. *Installation of a minister.*

INSTALLATION is the settling of a pastor over a particular church, who was previously settled, but has been

dismissed. It slightly differs from Ordination, since it is not customary a second time to confer the offices and privileges, which have been previously conferred, unless the person has forfeited them by misconduct, and regained them again by reformation.

The preparatory proceedings of the Council are much the same, as in ordination; but evidence of a regular dismission is required. The public religious exercises are the same in number and order, but without the laying on of hands. The expressions, which are made use of in the performances, naturally vary with the difference in the situation of the person, to whom they relate. In consequence of this, and of the omitting the ceremony of imposing hands, what is, on other occasions, termed the Ordaining or Consecrating, is, on this, termed the Installing prayer.

### § 82. *Accountability of delegates and ministers to the churches.*

It would seem reasonable, if delegates and pastors on these occasions are the representatives of the churches, that they should be responsible in some measure to those, for whom they act. On this subject the following sentiments are expressed in Samuel Mather's learned Apology for the Liberties of the New England Churches.

"Particular churches then, (he says, ch. III.) are possessed of this right and privilege of appointing and sending forth elders [ministers] and other delegates on suitable occasions; and by the same reason they may *call them to an account at their return*. And if upon inquiry it shall be found, that they have done any thing prejudicial to the truth and peace of the Gospel, they may justly expostulate with them, and ask the reasons of their conduct, and refuse to regard what they have been doing.—

Nor indeed can any thing be more fit and suitable than this, that the Messengers of particular churches, who have done amiss, or lay under the suspicion of irregular conduct, and a faulty management of their affairs, should be questioned by the churches, whose messengers they are, and in whose service they are employed.

" And as this is fit and suitable in itself, that the brethren in particular churches should call their delegates to an account for their management in their service ; there is also an instance to be given from the Scripture, which will sufficiently justify the brethren in the use of this liberty ; it is Acts xi. 2d and 3d verses ; where we read, that, when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they, that were of the circumcision, contended with him, or rather called him to an account, in order to pass their judgment, saying, *Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised and didst eat with them.* And it follows in the next verse, that Peter rehearsed from the beginning and expounded by Order unto them.

" Now, if the brethren might demand of an Apostle the reasons of his behaviour, and if the Apostle thought himself accountable to them, and, therefore, obliged to apologize for his conduct before them, the conclusion is strong and irresistible, that now the brethren have the liberty and much more to inquire concerning the management of their elders and other delegates," &c.—See also on this subject, Platform, ch. XV. § 2; Cotton's Book of the Keys, ch. VI. p. 26, Lond. 4to Ed.

### § 83. *Of the members of Councils substituting others in their stead.*

The same writer, and in connection with the subject of the preceding section, considers the power or right of a member, who has been chosen to act in Council, to

*substitute* another in his room. "But supposing, he remarks, as it is a supposable case, that any delegates from particular churches, upon emergent occasions should substitute others in their room, and so should not be able to give any account of their transactions? I answer, that, although the case may be supposed, the *thing ought not to be*; for none in such cases have the power of substituting others in their room and stead; any more than an ambassador from one prince or commonwealth hath the power of substituting whom he pleases to perform the embassy for him," &c.

§ 84. *Of inviting others to sit as members, who are not chosen by the churches.*

The writer, just cited from, may also be considered as expressing the sense of the churches concerning the right of Councils to invite, on their own authority, other persons to sit and act with them. Referring, as there is reason to suppose, to such cases in particular, to which at any rate his statement will apply, he says, "No persons have a right to consult, vote, or act in behalf of any particular church, but by virtue of a delegation from that church. It is this alone, that empowers them. And if, without such empowering, any shall pretend to act, as their delegates, they must be deemed busy-bodies in other men's matters."

Further; there does not appear to be any Congregational authority whatever for the particular church, that assembles the Council, to invite individuals to sit and act in the same, in their own persons and right, and not as the representatives of sister churches. Admitting the existence of Congregationalism as a system, it can be clearly made out, that the church, which assembles the Council, is restricted, as well as the Council itself, in its

mode of proceeding. Such a restriction is implied in the nature of Councils. It is laid down as an undoubted principle, that Councils are founded ultimately on the ground of church communion and fellowship. If, therefore, individuals, (not the representatives, and perhaps not the members of churches,) were permitted to act in Councils, whatever may be their standing and character, this fundamental principle would be unsettled, and perhaps ultimately subverted.

---

## CHAPTER EIGHTH.

### ORDINATION OF MISSIONARIES.

#### § 85. *Occasions and need of missionary ordination.*

Congregationalists, as a part of the laborers in the great vineyard of the world, consider themselves under obligations to do what lays in their power, to extend the knowledge of the Gospel. The labors of some of their ministers among the Savages, particularly the devoted Eliot, have called forth, even in distant parts of the world, the warmest expressions of approbation and gratitude.

Down to the present day, Missionaries have been sent forth, not only to the Indian tribes of North America, but to those, who are without the knowledge of God, in different and distant parts of the earth. These Missionaries may justly be considered as sent abroad by the churches, inasmuch as they are supported by their contributions, attended by their prayers, and protected by their constant solicitude. It is true, that the immediate agents, in designating and arranging their departure,

are Missionary Societies ; but these societies, when the subject is rightly considered, are only the agents and representatives of the churches.

The churches, therefore, in the exercise of that Superintendence, which naturally falls to them, and having in view the great importance and solemnity of the work of Missionaries to the heathen, have deemed it advisable, that they should receive Ordination, and, in that way, be formally and solemnly set apart to their responsible undertaking.

§ 86. *Of ordaining for distant churches at the invitation of the same.*

This practice, which seems to be fully justified by the circumstances, under which it takes place, was introduced by degrees ; the first approach to which was probably as follows.—In the early settlement of the country, it was difficult, or rather impossible for the remote churches to ordain a minister through the instrumentality of churches in their immediate vicinity, since there were none such. They, therefore, chose their minister, and left it to churches at a distance, (such as they could fix upon,) to set apart the individual selected, by prayer and imposition of hands, and to give the right hand of fellowship.

A somewhat peculiar instance, but fully illustrative of the practice, occurred in the year 1726. A Mr. Smith had preached to a Congregational society in Bermuda ; the only one, it would seem, on the island at that time. The church made choice of him as their minister, but under the circumstances of the case they desired, that he should come to New England, and be ordained here ; which was accordingly done in July of the above mentioned year at Boston.

And we have reason to believe, the practice was not unfrequent, since it is expressly mentioned in the ancient RATIO DISCIPLINE, Art. II. § 11.—“ Sometimes it has fallen out, that, in some of the distant provinces and plantations destitute of *ordainers*, a godly people, associating for the worship of God our Saviour, have signified unto some of the pastors in this country, that they desire such a person, as they mention, to be ordained here, and sent from hence unto them. The pastors, thus applied unto, have here called a public assembly, and have in their presence given this person an opportunity publicly, and with all due solemnity, to declare his accepting the pastoral care of the flock, that have sent for him. And so they have **ORDAINED** him, and sent him away, with proper testimonials.”

§ 87. *Ordination of Missionaries to the heathen.*

But the case was somewhat different, when Missionaries came to be sent to savage or heathen nations. In some instances; as in that of the Indian apostle, Eliot, persons had been previously settled over particular churches, and had received ordination of course; but this was seldom the case, and was obviously a state of things, which could not generally be counted on. The churches had reason to believe, that much the greater number of missionaries would be young persons, and such as would devote themselves to that work alone.

It does not appear to have been maintained\* at any

---

\* We speak here of the earlier periods of our ecclesiastical history. A recent writer of merit on Congregationalism, (the Author of the statement of the Dedham Case, and Considerations on Congregational Church Polity, p. 54,) has suggested doubts on the tendency of the practice under consideration. We think him right, where he speaks of missionary ordination as an *apparent*, rather than a real deviation from Congregational principle. But if such be the case, and if the practice

period, that the ceremony of missionary ordination was superfluous and unnecessary ; but on the contrary, it was ever thought to be intimately connected with the best religious interests of those, to whom the Missionaries were sent. It was admitted, that unordained missionaries, as well as others, could preach to the heathen, and instruct them in various ways. But it was considered highly necessary to baptize serious and credible converts, and to introduce them to a participation in the symbolical sacrament of the Lord's supper. And this was not permitted, by Congregational Principles and Order, to any person, who had not been ordained.

#### § 88. *Early instances of missionary ordination.*

With such views of the necessity of missionary ordination, our ancestors could hardly fail, from time to time, expressly to acknowledge this part of the system, and to reduce it to practice. In the HEADS OF AGREEMENT, entered into between the Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the year 1690, there is an Article, in which, there is reason to suppose, missionary ordination is had in view, viz : " That *ordinarily* none shall be ordained to the work of the ministry, but such as are called and chosen thereto by a particular church ;" expressions, which clearly imply, that there are cases of such a nature as to require ordination without a choice or call from a particular church ; or at least that ordination may in some cases be antecedent to such choice.

In December of 1733, three missionaries of the Edinburgh Society for propagating Christian Knowledge, were ordained at Boston, as missionaries to the Savages on the be, from time to time, explained and suitably guarded, there is reason to anticipate much good from it, while the evils, which are feared, will be avoided ; (See § 90.)

borders of New England; in which ceremony Drs. Colman and Sewall, and Mr. Prince assisted. Mr. John Sergeant was ordained missionary to the Housatonic or Stockbridge Indians in August, 1735, at Deerfield, Mass. Mr. Joseph Bowman was ordained as a missionary, to labor among the Mohawks, in 1762; and the list of such instances of an early date might be increased, if it were necessary.

Hence we may conclude, that missionary ordination, under certain circumstances, is a settled and acknowledged part of the Congregational system.

§ 89. *This practice a security to the heathen themselves.*

And it may perhaps be regarded as some recommendation of the course, which has been adopted, that it is necessary, in some degree at least, to the security of the heathen themselves. Surrounded by idolaters, they have no resource, when they first receive the Gospel, but to depend on the instructions and the administrations of foreigners. They would, therefore, be liable to be deceived, if they were to take the first step in the selection of their officers, and if there were not a previous ordination of their agents in the country, from which they come. But this danger of the heathen is obviated by the course pursued, since the churches, by whom the missionaries are sent out, will not be likely to aid in the ordination of an indiscreet, ignorant, or irreligious man.

§ 90. *Its consistency with the church's right of election.*

But it may properly be observed here, that the introduction of the practice in question is, in some measure, an infringement of the distinctive Congregational principle; that election by a particular church ought to pre-

cede ordination. No doubt this difficulty was fully felt by the early framers of our system, but they preferred incurring the responsibility of deviating from the principle to that of being accessory to the injury of the heathen. But even this reluctant deviation is rather in appearance than reality; since the ordination of missionaries is not necessarily understood to be exclusive of election by particular churches, but only antecedent to it. The mode of proceeding is inverted, but without an alienation of the right.

The churches may be regarded as ordaining their missionaries, and as extending the right hand of fellowship, by anticipation. And it still lays with the heathen churches, whenever they shall be in a situation fully to appreciate and exercise their rights, to yield, or to withhold their approval of what has been done. Congregationalists could never, without gross inconsistency and sin, think of depriving them of any rights, which they claim for themselves.

#### § 91. *Historical facts illustrative of the practice.*

It may be added, as illustrative of what has been said, and of the operation of Congregational principles, that, if a missionary should dissolve his connection with the Society, that sent him, for the purpose of settling over a particular church in heathen lands, the choice of that church would be necessary; and religious services would be desirable, so far as they could be had, the same as in a case of Installation.

The facts of our early religious history strengthen the belief, that this would be the only suitable course. The converted Indians at Martha's Vineyard, who were gathered into Christian churches by the Mayhews and others, had their own distinct pastors and other officers. We

are told, that the pastors, who were natives, were regularly ordained, the pious Eliot and Cotton assisting in that work; but the Indian churches were previously required to make the choice for themselves, as a right of which they ought not to be deprived. In 1670, the missionary among the Indians at Marshpee, Mr. Richard Bourne, was also ordained by Eliot and Cotton, having been previously chosen by the free election of the native church.\*

### § 92. *Calling of the Council.*

It is not ordinarily the custom of the churches to assemble in a case of this kind at the suggestion and desire of an individual. Such a practice would too much encourage the application of persons, who are not in a situation to form a correct judgment, or who mistake the mere desire for the ability to do good. The individual, who is generally in the employ of some Missionary Society, first makes his application to such Society. If the Society sees reason for approving and seconding the design, it applies by means of Letters Missive to a suitable number of churches, desiring their advice and assistance in the proposed ordination. And a call on the churches, made under such circumstances, of course meets their prompt and respectful attention.

### § 93. *Council's proceedings and religious services.*

The proceedings of the Council and the public religious ceremonies are much the same, as in other cases of ordination. It is considered suitable, however, to lay

---

\* See the Letter of Increase Mather to Dr. Leusden of the University of Utrecht, with the Notes of Cotton Mather in the Life of Eliot; Allen's Biogr. Dict. Art. Bourne; and Mass. Historical Collections, 2d Series, Vol. III. p. 13.

before the Council some explicit evidence of the serious and devoted intentions of the missionaries in respect to the work, to which they are about to be set apart. The following public confession was made by the missionaries ordained at Boston in 1733, referred to in § 88 :

" We do now in the presence of Christ, and before this assembly as the Lord's witnesses ; before God, angels, and men, willingly and freely, with humility and fear, offer ourselves first unto the Lord, and then to the service of souls, to the work of the ministry in general, and particularly to that mission, to which we deem ourselves called of God, by his special and singular providence, to carry the Gospel among the heathen in our borders. And we will by his grace, so long as God gives us opportunity, humbly, diligently, and faithfully, apply ourselves to this work of the Lord, as those, that must give an account of their stewardship."

The Instructions to the Missionaries, originating in the Society which employs them, are publickly announced ; and in some instances the great interest of the occasion has been heightened by the administration of the Lord's Supper.

### CHAPTER NINTH.

## CHURCH CENSURES AND EXCOMMUNICA-TION.

In inquiring into the Congregational doctrine of church censures, it would seem, that the substance of what has been said by the successive writers, who have considered it, is to be found in the Platform of 1648, at the fourteenth chapter. The various topics are concisely

and happily adjusted in that venerable instrument; and the whole chapter, precisely as it stands, is here given, except that a few remarks, which are distinguished by brackets, are added at the end of certain sections.

§ 94. *Design or object of church censures.*

The censures of the church are appointed by Christ for the preventing, removing, and healing of offences in the church; for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren; for the deterring others from the like offences; for purging out the leaven, which may infect the whole lump; for vindicating the honor of Christ, and of his church, and the holy profession of the Gospel; and for preventing of the wrath of God, that may justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer his covenant, and the seals thereof to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders; 1 Tim. v. 20, Jude 19, Deut. xiii. 11, 1 Cor. v. 6, Rom. ii. 24, Rev. ii. 14, 15, 16, 20.

[The right or authority of the churches to act in cases of reproof and censure, both in their individual and combined capacity, is taken for granted in this chapter of the Platform, as it had been already asserted at Chap. X. § 5. The principal grounds, on which that authority is held to be founded, appear to be threefold:—(1) *Natural right*; which entitles every society to watch over the conduct of its members, so far as may be necessary to secure the acknowledged objects, for which it was formed;—(2) *Consent*; the right and duty of church members, to exercise in respect to each other a suitable watch and discipline, being clearly implied in the terms of their church-covenants, as they are commonly framed;—(3) *The Scriptures*; *If thy brother shall trespass against thee, &c.* Matt. xviii. 15; *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye, which are spiritual, restore such an*

one, &c. Gal. vi. 1 ; *Warn them, which are unruly, 1 Thess. v. 14.—See Cotton's Book of the Keys, CH. III. §§ 3, 4 ; the Platform, Chap. X. § 2 ; and particularly Chapter VI. of Samuel Mather's Apology.]*

§ 95. *Of suspension and excommunication when the offence is private.*

If an offence be private, (one brother offending another,) the offender is to go and acknowledge his repentance for it unto his offended brother, who is then to forgive him. But if the offender neglect or refuse to do it the brother offended is to go, and convince, and admonish him of it between themselves privately. If, therefore, the offender be brought to repent of his offence, the admonisher hath won his brother.

But if the offender hear not his brother, the brother offended is to take with him one or two more, that, in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established, (whether the word of admonition, if the offender receive it, or the word of complaint, if he refuse it.) For if he refuse it, the offended brother is by the mouth of the **ELDERS**, [ministers, as the term is to be understood at the present time,] to tell the church; and if he hear the church, and declare the same by penitent confession, he is recovered and gained.

And if the church discern him to be willing to hear, yet not fully convinced of his offence, as in case of heresy, they are to dispense to him a public admonition ; which, declaring the offender to lie under the public offence of the church, doth thereby WITHHOLD OR SUSPEND him from the holy fellowship of the Lord's Supper, till his offence be removed by penitent confession.

If he still continue obstinate, they are to cast him out by EXCOMMUNICATION ; Matt. v. 23, 24, Luke xvii. 3, 4, Matt. xviii. 15, 16, 17, Titus iii. 10.

**§ 96. *Punishment of public and known offences.***

But if the offence be more public at first, and of a more heinous and criminal nature, to wit, such as are condemned by the light of nature, then the church, without such gradual proceedings, is to cast out the offender from their holy communion, for the further mortifying of his sins, and the healing of his soul in the day of the Lord Jesus ; 1 Cor. v. 4, 5, 11.

[It seems to be especially the duty of the pastor, in a case of this kind, to bring the subject before the church ; otherwise the affair might be unduly neglected, and the cause of religion suffer. The ancient **RATIO DISCIPLINÆ**, (Art. VIII. § 3,) says, If one under the covenant and government of the church fall into a scandalous transgression against the laws of our holy Redeemer, and that transgression be at once and at first a matter of public fame, the PASTOR, upon the cry, reckons it his duty to inquire into it, and bring it immediately under an ecclesiastical cognizance.\*]

\* At a meeting of an Association of ministers, held at Cambridge at an early period, (**MAGNALIA**, Bk. V. § 8,) it was decided to be particularly a minister's duty to inquire into public scandals, although no formal complaint should be brought to him ; and among others, for the following reasons.—(1) According to the Apostolical direction, an inquiry into an offence was ordered upon this consideration, viz. *It is commonly reported*, 1 Cor. v. 1.—(2) The elders of Israel were to make inquiry into an offence after this manner, viz. *If thou shalt hear say, then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask diligently* ; Deut. xiii. 12, 14.—(3) The neighbors may be so far under the power of temptation, as to forbear making orderly declarations of scandals committed ; and it is, therefore, necessary, that such things fall under the inquiry of the pastor, alarmed thereto by common fame.—(4) The pastor of a church is by *office* to watch over the conversation of the people, and a noise of scandal, arisen in the conversation of those under his watch, is a sufficient provocation for his inquiry into it.

§ 97. *Of the proper spirit or temper in dealing with offenders.*

In dealing with an offender, great care is to be taken, that we be neither over strict or rigorous, nor too indulgent or remiss. Our proceeding herein, ought to be with a spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted ; and that the best of us have need of much forgiveness from the Lord. Yet the winning and healing of the offender's soul, being the end of these endeavors, we must not daub with untempered mortar, nor heal the wounds of our brethren slightly. On some have compassion, others save with fear ; Gal. vi. 1, Matt. xviii. 34, 35, Ezek. xiii. 10.

[Although the pastor is the agent in bringing public and known scandals before the church, and is required to do it without unnecessary delay, there is good reason to believe, he would not be approved in taking that step, without first having sought an interview with the offender ; either alone, or attended by a few of the brethren. It is true, that such scrupulous formality of procedure is not requisite in cases of a public nature, as in those, which are known only to one, or to any very small number. But the law of Christian kindness is thought to require, that the offender should enjoy the privilege of privately disclosing either his defence or his repentance, previous to the public accusation. And such has been the practice of the churches.—See Mather's Ratio Disciplinæ, Art. VIII. § 3 ; also Dwight's Theology, Sermon CLXII. &c.]

§ 98. *Treatment and rights of the excommunicate.*

While the offender remains excommunicate, the church is to refrain all member-like communion with him

in spiritual things, and also from all familiar communion with him in civil things, further than the necessity of natural, domestic, or civil relations do require; and are, therefore, to forbear to eat and drink with him, that he may be ashamed; Matt. xviii. 17, 1 Cor. v. 11, 2 Thess. iii. 6, 14.

Excommunication being a spiritual punishment, it doth not prejudice the excommunicate in, nor deprive him of his civil rights, and, therefore, toucheth not princes, nor other magistrates in point of their civil dignity or authority. And the excommunicate being but as a publican and a heathen, (heathens being lawfully permitted to come to hear the word in church assemblies,) we acknowledge, therefore, the like liberty of hearing the word may be permitted to persons excommunicate, that is permitted unto heathen. And because we are not without hope of his recovery, we are not to account him as an enemy, but to admonish him as a brother; 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25, 2 Thess. iii. 14.

#### § 99. *Restoration of the offender on repentance.*

If the Lord sanctify the censure to the offender, so as by the grace of Christ he doth testify his repentance with humble confession of his sins, and judging of himself, giving glory unto God, the church is then to forgive him, and to comfort him, and to restore him to the wonted brotherly communion, which formerly he enjoyed with them; 2 Cor. vii. 8.

[The churches do not suspend or excommunicate for any particular length of time. There is much reason to regard such a course as contrary to the will of Christ, although precedents may be found for it in ecclesiastical history. Whenever there are satisfactory indications of repentance, whether after a shorter or longer period, the

offender is entitled to restoration ; and it is not only the acknowledged duty, but the practice of the churches promptly and cheerfully to grant it.]

§ 100. *Of immediate separation from corrupt or scandalous churches.*

The suffering of profane or scandalous livers to continue in fellowship, and partake in the sacraments, is doubtless a great sin in those, that have power in their hands to redress it, and do it not. Nevertheless, inasmuch as Christ and his apostles in their times, and the prophets and the other godly in theirs, did lawfully partake of the Lord's commanded ordinances in the Jewish church, and neither taught nor practised separation from the same, though unworthy ones were permitted therein, and inasmuch as the faithful in the church of Corinth, wherein were many unworthy persons and practices, are never commanded to absent themselves from the sacraments, because of the same ; therefore the godly in like cases are not presently to separate. Rev. ii 14, 15, 20. Matt. xxiii. 3. Acts iii, 1. 1 Cor. vi, and xv. 12.

§ 101. *Of refusing to attend the Sacrament with scandalous persons.*

As separation from such a church, wherein profane, and scandalous persons are tolerated, is not presently necessary ; so for the members thereof, otherwise unworthy, hereupon to abstain from communicating with such a church in the participation of the sacraments is unlawful. For as it were unreasonable for an innocent person to be punished for the faults of others, wherein he hath no hand, and whereunto he gave no consent ; so is it more unreasonable, that a godly man should neglect duty, and punish himself, in not coming for his portion,

in the blessing of the seals, as he ought, because others are suffered to come, that ought not; especially considering that himself doth neither consent to their sins, nor to their approaching to the ordinance in their sin, nor to the neglect of others who should put them away, and do not; but on the contrary, doth heartily mourn for these things, and modestly and seasonably stir up others to do their duty.

If the church cannot be reformed, they may use their liberty, as is specified, chap. xiii. sect. 4, [referring to the Cambridge Platform.] But this all the godly are bound unto, even every one to do his endeavor, according to his power and place, that the unworthy may be duly proceeded against by the church, to whom this matter doth appertain; 2 Chron. xxx. 18, Gen. xviii. 25, Ezek. ix. 4.

#### §. 102. *Form of suspension from Mather's Discipline.*

The Platform goes no further on this subject. Relative to the mere forms of proceeding, something more is said in the Ratio Disciplinae. The vote of suspension, when passed by the church, is required to be accompanied, at its formal communication to the offender, with a statement of his offence, and with friendly and solemn admonition. This is done by the pastor at some public meeting of the church, and of course implies the presence of the offender. His refusal to attend, therefore, while it does not prevent the sentence of suspension being communicated to him in some way, would rightly be considered as aggravating his former delinquency. The pastor, (says the work last referred to,) distinctly sets before him his faults, with the several rules in the Gospel, which have in his faults been violated, concluding with terms of this import;

" Wherefore, in the name of the most glorious God, our Saviour, (which name you have dishonored by sinning against him,) and with the concurrence of this, his people, (a people, that long to see you recovered out of the sinful distemper now upon you,) I ADMONISH you to repent of the scandals, which we have seen proved against you, as well as of the more secret, faults, by which you have provoked the Holy One to leave you to what is more openly scandalous. I ADMONISH you to repair unto the blood of the Redeemer, that you may be cleansed from all your sins in that fountain set open for sin and for uncleanness. I ADMONISH you to cry mightily unto the Spirit of the Lord for that new and soft heart, that shall incline you not only to confess your sin with unfeigned sorrow, but also to forsake it with eternal detestation.

I declare unto you, that, as there is grace enough in our great Saviour for you, if you return to him, so upon such a return this flock of His will make you some representation of his grace, by renewing the marks of their favor to you. But I signify unto you, that, until we see good symptoms of a penitent heart upon you, we SUSPEND YOU FROM THE PRIVILEGES OF OUR SACRED FELLOWSHIP," &c.

§ 103. *Form of excommunication from the same.*

The pastor, (says the same work, chap. viii. § 8,) when he comes to pass the sentence of EXCOMMUNICATION, does make as convincing a speech as he can to the offender, setting before him the heinous nature of his offence, and of his impenitency under it. At the same time, he calls upon all the people to take notice of the holiness, which the church must and will manifest, in their not bearing with those that are evil, and of the transcendent holiness in the glorious head of the church,

whereof he will have every church to be sensible. He then concludes with something of this import ;

" And now, in the name of the glorious Lord, Jesus Christ, and with the concurrence of his faithful people now assembled, I do declare you to be cut off, (your sin hath procured such an excision for you,) from the privileges and expectations of such as are in covenant with the churches of God.

I declare you to belong visibly to the sinful and woful kingdom of Satan, the ruler of the darkness of this world. I declare you to be a person, from whom the followers of our holy Lord are to withdraw, as from one, that walks disorderly. And this just sentence is now passed upon you, as a representation of a sentence much more dreadful, to be passed upon you in the day when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come to judge the world, except it be prevented by a seasonable repentance, which may our gracious God of his infinite mercy bestow upon you."

---

NOTE.—In cases of suspension and excommunication, as in other cases, (§. 55,) the will of the majority of all the male members present is considered the will of the whole. It was not so in the beginning; but the churches, like juries, were required, in the days of our fathers, to be *unanimous* on all questions. This practice was soon found to be attended with serious inconveniences; important proceedings being sometimes stopped by it. To obviate this, the singular practice was reported to of suspending the *minority*, which of course left the others without a dissenting voice. But it was soon seen, that this course was not only very tyrannical and unjust in itself, but that it virtually admitted the right of a majority to govern. (See the answer of the Elders of New England, to XXXII Questions, at Qs. XVII; an answer of the same to IX Positions, at Pos. V; and Home's ECCLESIASTICA METHERMENEUTICA at Qs. XI.)

## CHAPTER TENTH.

## TRANSFER OF RELATIONSHIP.

**§ 104. Nature and obligation of the church covenant.**

The CHURCH-COVENANT, considered in reference to the members, partakes of the nature of a Contract. There is a promise made by the parties to the covenant, which, on the one hand, mutually secures certain benefits; and, on the other, pledges the reciprocal performance of certain duties. And the contract is of the more solemn kind, since it is made for religious ends, is required as a religious duty, and is avowedly entered into in the presence of God and the Saviour. A release from it, therefore, cannot be had, except for urgent and solemn reasons, and with a strict regard to the terms, either express or implied, on which it is made.

"Church members, (says the Platform, ch. xiii. § 1,) may not remove or depart from the church, and so one from another as they please, nor without just and weighty cause, but ought to live and dwell together, inasmuch as they are commanded not to forsake the assembling of themselves together; Heb. x. 25. Such departure tends to the dissolution and ruin of the body, as the pulling of stones and pieces of timber from the building, and of members from the natural body, tend to the destruction of the whole."—See also the ANSWER of the Elders of the New England Churches to NINE POSITIONS, proposed by certain ministers of England, 1639, POSIT. vi.

**§ 105. The church to be consulted in cases of proposed removal.**

The mere love of change, an imperfect sense of moral obligation, inordinate and unfounded jealousies, and oth-

er causes may lead persons to seek a removal from the church, of which they are members. But as a departure on such grounds would be highly sinful and injurious, it is requisite, in all cases of intended secession, to advise with the church ; and a removal without such consultation would be considered unauthorized. The practice of consulting the church on these occasions results not only from the fact of its connection with the well-being of all the parties concerned and of the church at large, but also from the reasonable principle, that those, who are joined with consent, should not, in ordinary cases, depart without consent.

#### *§ 106. Of sinful and of doubtful cases of departure.*

The member, therefore, who wishes to transfer his relationship, lays the subject before the brethren, with whom he is in covenant, for their consideration ; and that they may act upon it according to the best of their judgment. " If a member's departure be manifestly unsafe and sinful, (says the Platform, ch. xiii. § 3,) the church may not consent therunto ; for in so doing they would not act in faith, and would partake with him in his sin.—If the case be doubtful, and the person not to be persuaded, it seemeth best to leave the matter unto God, and not forcibly to detain him ; Rom. xiv. 23, 1 Tim. v. 22, Acts xxi. 14."

#### *§ 107. Just or sufficient reasons of removal.*

(1) Of what are considered in the Platform as just causes of removal, one is particular or PERSONAL PERSECUTION.—When, in consequence of the number and violence of his personal enemies, an individual is obliged to flee to a distance from his brethren, and has no prospect of a permanent return ; this is a good reason for his re-

moving his relation from the particular church, with which he is connected ; especially if there be some other church, with which he can connect himself. Such seems to have been the situation of Paul, when he fled from Damascus. And the same just ground of removal may still more frequently happen in those times of general persecution, which affect not only individuals, but the whole body of believers ; Acts viii. 1, ix. 25—30.

(2) When a person voluntarily removes to another place, in consequence of the situation of his domestic concerns, or from other causes, and has the prospect of spiritual edification in his new residence, it is a just ground of seeking a transference of his church relationship ; Neh. xiii. 20. And the church cannot lawfully detain him.

(3) It is also just cause of removal from a church, when a person cannot remain in it without partaking in sin ; Eph. v. 11.—This is as agreeable to reason as the Scriptures ; since sin is the violation of our obligations to God, which are paramount to all obligations, which partake so much of a merely conventional nature as church covenants. An obligation, which binds us to a particular church, is necessarily dissolved, when it contravenes that higher obligation, which binds us to our Creator. Still, in all these cases, the church, as already has appeared, (§ 105,) has a claim to be consulted, previous to the person's leaving it.

#### § 108. *Persons dismissed are to receive Letters of Dismissal.*

The person, who requests a Dismission, makes known the particular church, with which he proposes to join himself. That church, having a knowledge of his previous membership in another, and desirous not to be de-

luded into precipitate measures, does not receive him without evidence of his regular dismission. The church, therefore, that dismisses, is under obligations to furnish to the person dismissed a certificate or letter to that effect; which, however, being founded on the avowed expectation of forming another particular relationship, is necessarily conditional.—The Letter of Dismissal states;

*That the bearer of the same, a person in regular standing, has expressed a desire to remove his relationship; that the church, having acceded to his application, recommend him to the more immediate fellowship of those, with whom he is now to reside; and that they have voted his Dismissal and the full dissolution of his present church relationship, as soon so he shall be received into the sister church.*

Such being the nature and form of the Letter of Dismissal, it becomes of no effect, if he be not received according to his expectations, and his first church relationship remains good. The church, says the Platform, cannot make a member no member, but by excommunication: (Platform, ch. xiii. § 7; Mather's RAT. Disc. Art. viii. § 2; Answer of the Elders of the New England Churches to Nine Positions, &c. *Posit. IV.*)

#### § 109. *Of letters of recommendation without dismissing.*

Letters may be given from one church to another without dismissing.—“ If a member (says the Platform, ch. xiii. §§ 8, 9,) be called to remove only for a time, where a church is, Letters of Recommendation are requisite and sufficient for communion with that church, in the ordinances and in their watch. As Phœbe, a servant in the church at Cenchrea, had a letter written for her to the church at Rome, that she might be received as becometh saints; Rom. xvi. 1, 2, 2 Cor. iii. 1.

Such Letters, (the LITERÆ COMMUNICATORIÆ of the ancients, or, as Tertullian calls them, LITERÆ PACIS,) are accompanied with the church salutations, and are to this effect;

*That the bearer thereof, having been admitted to the fellowship of the within named church, and having conducted himself in that relation without offence, is upon that account recommended to Communion in special ordinances, and to fellowship with those churches, where the Providence of God shall call him.\* See Cotton's Way of the Churches of Christ in New England, ch. vi. § 2.*

## CHAPTER ELEVENTH.

### PASTORAL ASSOCIATIONS.

#### § 110. *Origin of pastoral associations.*

The formal and permanent union of ministers, within certain convenient limits, in what are termed ASSOCIATIONS, may justly be regarded as a part of the Congregational polity. Stated meetings of ministers, which may be traced back to the earliest days of these churches, were approved and recommended in particular by the venerable

\* Ordained ministers and other preachers may be supposed to stand even more in need of such testimonials, than lay-men. But very properly in such cases, Letters of Recommendation are not given by particular churches, but in their united capacity. That is to say, the great ecclesiastical bodies of the country recommend, instead of the separate churches, whom they represent. For instance, Letters of Recommendation to ministers, going from the State of Maine, are given by the General Conference of that State by means of a Committee, appointed for that purpose.

Hooker.\* It is affirmed, that during the whole of his ministerial life, the pastors in the neighborhood of his residence, held frequent meetings for the purpose of mutual consultation and advice in religious things. One of the last and emphatic sayings of this father of the churches was, *We must agree upon constant meetings of ministers.*

The advice and example of such a man, in whom his brethren, and the churches at large had been accustomed to place the greatest confidence, was not without its effect. The ministers in other neighborhoods soon began to hold similar meetings; and with profitable results. As early as 1690, such ministerial meetings or Associations had been formed throughout the country. We have an account of one in particular, that embraced the ministers in the neighborhood of Cambridge, in Massachusetts, and met stately at that place every six weeks. The rules or constitution of this Association, together with some of their decisions on the questions proposed to them for consideration, are to be found in the Fifth Book of the **MAGNALIA**. They have multiplied with the increase of the churches and pastors; and at the present time exceed sixty in number.

---

#### \*THOMAS HOOKER.

This worthy and pious man, who died in 1647 at the age of sixty one years, was minister at Hartford, in Connecticut. He sustained a high reputation, not only as a man of piety, but as a preacher and a writer. In allusion to the mental characteristics of the men, Hooker was called the Luther, and Cotton the Melancthon of New-England. He wrote various valuable works of a practical nature. But his most celebrated treatise related to the constitution and order of the Congregational Churches, and was entitled, *A Survey of the Sum of Church Discipline*. It was printed at London in 1648, under the inspection of the famous Dr. Thomas Goodwin, and in a quarto volume of nearly 500 pages. (*Holmes' Am. Annals*, I. 344; *Allen's Biogr. Dict. Art. Hooker*; the **Magnalia**, Bk. III.)

**§ 111. *Objects of pastoral associations.***

Of the various objects of pastoral associations, one is an increased mutual friendship and support, which cannot be had without an intimate and regulated intercourse. Exposed to peculiar labors and trials, the pastors of churches are often brought within the influence of that principle of human nature, which leads men to solicit, at such times, aid and sympathy. And it is the natural result of our mental constitution, that brotherly love should be increased by brotherly support.

Another object is, that they may improve by means of common consultation and inquiry, in the knowledge of those things, which particularly pertain to their important calling. They exchange opinions, and examine, with each other's assistance, the Holy Scriptures. They propose and solve cases of duty and conscience;\* they disclose to each other the state of their respective churches; and consider, as becomes persons in their situation, of the means, which shall tend to the increase of personal holiness and the spread of the Gospel abroad.

Such being the objects of ministerial Associations, they are approved by the churches at large; the more especially as they are generally made the occasions not only of private supplication, but of public religious services.

---

\*The following are some of the questions discussed in the Cambridge Association, mentioned in the preceding section, the decisions of which are given in the MAGNALIA; Whether there are any cases, wherein a minister of the Gospel may lay down his ministry—How far the confessions of a guilty conscience ought to be kept secret by the minister to whom they are made—What respect is due to places of public worship—Whether it be lawful for a man to marry his wife's sister—What is the duty of the church to those, who desert the Lord's Supper in consequence of private prejudices, &c.

*§ 112. General or State associations.*

Ministerial associations in the first instance are usually of no great extent ; being limited for the most part by the civil divisions of counties. They are governed by written constitutions of their own framing ; which not only state the objects, for which they are formed, but authorize the choice of the necessary officers, and indicate the times and places of meeting.

But from these minor bodies, have been formed General or State Associations, extending over the limits of a whole State. They are composed of Delegates, chosen from the minor or County Associations, and, like them, are governed by a written constitution. Assemblies of clergymen of this description exist at the present time in the States of Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire.

*§ 113. Objects and religious exercises of General Associations.*

One of the benefits, consequent on the formation of these enlarged clerical bodies, and which results from the primary associations only in an inferior degree, is, that it extends the acquaintance of the pastors with each other ; and of course that mutual friendship and support in the duties and trials of their station, which has already been spoken of. Nor is this all.—Coming from different parts of their respective States, furnished from various sources of information, and viewing subjects in different and novel lights, they are the means of increasing and diffusing religious knowledge. Indeed all the benefits, which may be expected to result from the minor bodies, result from the General Associations in a still higher degree.

Like the minor Associations, they, from time to time,

discuss questions of a theoretical or practical nature ; they watch the prevailing vices of the times, and warn against them ; and endeavor by their persuasive addresses to indicate the path of duty, and to encourage to a religious life. To do good in the best sense of the phrase, is their design, and they, therefore, look upon any topic, having a relation to the intellectual, moral, and religious well-being of mankind both at home and abroad, a suitable subject of inquiry.\*

The meetings of the State Associations are commonly held a number of days ; there are public religious exercises, as well as assemblies of business and inquiry ; and the whole is closed by the solemn administration of the Lord's Supper.

#### § 114. *Relation of clerical associations to the rights of the churches.*

As the bodies under consideration are composed exclusively of ministers, some persons might conjecture, that they would attract towards themselves the suspicious

---

\* Various interesting facts illustrate this. We find, for instance, the General Association (Convention, as it was then called,) of N. Hampshire, consulting, as far back as the year 1758, on the literary interests of that State. They presented that year an earnest petition to the governor, Benning Wentworth, for a college charter. The subject was pursued subsequently, and by their enlightened views and steady perseverance, they prepared the way for the founding of Dartmouth College.

In the year 1810, a number of young men in the Theological Seminary of Andover, evinced a strong desire to be employed as Missionaries in India. But there were no permanent means of support. Nevertheless, a desire so sacred, heavenly, and noble could not be passed by unnoticed. It was communicated on the 27th of June to the General Association of Massachusetts then in session at Bradford; they deliberated upon it, and the result was the foundation of that institution, which has proved itself to be the ornament of the churches and the hope of perishing millions, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

and unfriendly regards of laymen. But it is not so.—They have been too frank in the disclosure of their principles and designs, too prudent in their procedures, to cause such undesirable results. Neither the Primary nor the General Associations consider themselves authorized to take measures arbitrarily to control, or in any way to restrict the liberties of the churches. This is not their right, nor their object, nor their desire. Attempts of such a nature would at once alienate that respect and affection, with which they are now regarded.

The General Association of Massachusetts, in the records of their annual meeting in 1807, expressly aver, that their body "is founded on the pure principles of Congregationalism. One design of it is to cherish, strengthen, and transmit these principles. It wholly disclaims ecclesiastical power or authority over the churches, or the opinions of individuals."

---

## CHAPTER TWELFTH.

### OF LICENSING TO PREACH.

#### § 115. *Early views of the churches in respect to preachers.*

In settling the government and order of these churches, it became a serious inquiry, in what way preachers should be first introduced into their work. No object was more dear to our forefathers, than the maintenance of a pure and faithful ministry. And it was, therefore, deemed important to exercise a watch over the first attempts at entering into the sacred office.

It was not altogether obvious at first, what course

should be pursued, in order to secure the great object, which our devout ancestors had in view. But, with characteristic and pious confidence, they trusted to the suggestions of time and Providence for the ultimate settlement of every thing in the best manner. One thing they well knew, that, if the ministry became corrupt, it would be altogether in vain, that they had transported themselves and their families "over the vast ocean to these goings down of the sun."

#### § 116. *Imperfect arrangements on this subject.*

For many years no particular plan seems to have been adopted. If persons could produce testimonials of church relationship, and of having passed through some approved system of education, they were permitted by the particular churches, with which they happened to be, to preach to them. It appears from Wise, (in his Church's Quarrel Espoused, or A Reply to certain Proposals, &c. Sect. IV.) that, as late as the year 1700, the chief test and trial, which was undergone, previous to the trial of ordination, was personal conversation, occasional preaching as opportunity presented, and a college degree or other testimonials of a literary kind.

But it was seen after a time, that such a course would in the end prove greatly detrimental to the character of the ministry, and to the cause of religion. And yet no means were devised, notwithstanding the solicitude of the churches, to settle this part of the Congregational Polity, until after the forming of clerical Associations, of which some account was given in the preceding chapter.

#### § 117. *Associations authorized to license preachers.*

It appears from Article Sixth of Mather's Ratio Disciplinæ, that the subject of licensing to preach was tak-

en up and particularly considered in a Convention of ministers, held at Boston about the beginning of the last century. The plan proposed was, that no person should be allowed to preach, without being furnished with a Testimonial under the hands of at least four or five settled pastors. And these pastors were required, previously to giving such Testimonial, to examine him in relation to his manner of life, his motives, and his literary and theological acquisitions.

This was one step, and a very considerable one, towards referring this important business to permanent associations of ministers, which at this time had been generally formed through the country. At a meeting of associated ministers, held at Boston, the 13th of September, 1705, the subject was brought under examination, and it was proposed to the churches, and advised as follows;

*That the candidates for the ministry, [not to settle, but merely to preach,] undergo a due trial by some or other of the association, concerning their qualification for the evangelical ministry: and that no particular pastor or congregation employ any one in occasional preaching, who has not been recommended by a Testimonial under the hands of some Association.*

The churches by degrees fell in with the plan, which was thus proposed to them; and it at length became a part of their settled polity. At a meeting of the General Association, (Convention, as the State Assembly of ministers was then called,) of New-Hampshire, held at Exeter, July 29, 1747, it was voted as follows; Whereas we think piety and learning, particularly a good acquaintance with the Scriptures, and a conversation as becomes the Gospel, necessary qualifications, among others mentioned by the Apostle, in a preacher of the

Gospel ; we AGREE not to encourage or approve any as candidates for the ministry till they are recommended by some Association ; unless they are persons, who have preached for some time, and have been approved of by ministers and churches acquainted with them.

*§ 118. Of the examination previous to licensing.*

It is deemed, therefore, against the Order of these churches for a person to offer himself as a preacher without a Testimonial or a License from an Association ; and also for a church to accept of such an offer, and thus encourage an irregular proceeding. Licenses are granted, however, by the Minor or Primary, and not by the General Associations.

The persons, applying for such purposes, undergo an examination ; and the great responsibility, therefore, of introducing an ignorant or an immoral person into the ministry rests with the body, to whom this power is committed. They are bound to withhold their assent to the request for a License, until they are satisfied, that the applicant possesses the requisite qualifications. And it is implied in this, that they are to obtain satisfactory evidence of moral and religious character, of church relationship, of worthy motives and desires in reference to the ministry, and of suitable attainments in literature and theological knowledge.

There is reason to believe, that the confidence of the churches has not been misplaced, and that the power of Licensing to preach has been rightly and wisely reposed in the Associations.

*§ 119. Length of time, for which Licenses are granted.*

No uniform principle appears to be established in respect to the time, for which Licenses are given. Gene-

rally they are without limit, but sometimes are given for a few months, a year, or two years, or other designated period. In such cases, they may be renewed at the expiration of the specified time, if the applicant sees fit, and no objections have arisen.

#### § 120. *Form of the License.*

Every License is in such form, and expressed in such language, as the Association deems most suitable ; but generally it is concise and merely to this import ;—That the person, having appeared before the Association at the time and place mentioned, had given them satisfactory evidence of a good moral and religious character, and of regular church standing ; That the Association are satisfied also in respect to his literary and theological qualifications ; And that they accordingly testify their approbation of him, as qualified to preach the Gospel, and recommend him as such, wherever the Divine Providence may call him.

#### § 121. *Of annulling or revoking Licenses.*

Licenses are, from their very nature, conditional. They are given for a particular purpose ; and they suppose, both in their present and in their future operation, the existence of certain qualities in the persons, to whom they are granted.

The existence of these qualities forms the condition, on which the License is granted. If, therefore, the Licentiate be found on public trial either mentally or morally deficient, the Association have a right to annul or revoke the License. This right has been fully acknowledged by the churches ; and it is the duty of the respective Associations to see it fully exercised, when occasion requires.

## CHAPTER THIRTEENTH.

## REMOVALS OF MINISTERS.

**§ 122. Early Congregational views of ministerial removals.**

The character of a minister has ever been highly esteemed in these churches ; and in ordinary cases it has proved a matter of no small difficulty to unloose the bond, which unites them to their people. It was said with undoubted truth, more than an hundred years ago, that the translation of a pastor is a thing more seldom occurring, and more hardly obtained in the churches of New England, than in many other of the Reformed churches. This state of things may result in part from the character and early associations of the people themselves ; and still more from the nature of the ministerial arrangements. The engagement, which binds a minister to his charge, is of a kind too sacred to be lightly entered into ; and the difficulty of its dissolution naturally corresponds to the great caution and seriousness, with which it was formed.

The language, which has come down to us from the early times, is to this import ;—“ A pastor, settled in the service of a people, is to be so sensible of his designation by the Spirit, and the providence of the Lord Jesus Christ, for that service, and of the account that he must give unto God about his behaviour in it, that his removal must not be rashly attempted, but with much consideration, consultation, supplication, and sincere desire to follow the conduct of heaven in it. The frowns of God use to follow removes, that have not so been regulated.”

**§ 123. Treatises or authorities on this subject.**

Still it is an acknowledged principle, that cases may exist, in which the removal of a minister from his people is suitable and necessary. The subject of removals of this kind, which are of a voluntary, and not of a disciplinary or compulsory nature, does not appear to be taken up in the Platform. But as it was a matter of much practical importance, it was early considered in the Cambridge Association, referred to at § 110; and their opinions were made known in an Article, entitled, *Propositions concerning the Cases, wherein a Minister may leave his people.*

These Propositions are referred to in the New England Brethren's Ratio Disciplinæ; and the sentiments, which are expressed in them, are spoken of, as being the sentiments and the rule of the churches. In a Treatise of Dr. Increase Mather, entitled, *A Seasonable Testimony to Good Order in the Churches, &c.* published in 1720, and in which the concurrence of the Boston Ministers is stated to be had, the same PROPOSITIONS are mentioned, as Decisions of acknowledged authority. Without doubt the Usage of the churches, which, in all cases is supposed to be founded on its serious convictions of duty, and is, therefore, their rule or Law, is in agreement with them. Hence it will be suitable to refer with confidence to the PROPOSITIONS in the consideration of the present subject.

**§ 124. First class of cases, justifying a minister's removal.**

The first class of cases, which may rightly lead to a minister's departure from his flock, seems to be founded on the obvious principle, that his usefulness among them greatly depends on their confidence, good-will, and love.

" In case there be arisen, (say the PROPOSITIONS,) those incurable prejudices, dissensions, animosities, and implacable offences between a pastor and his people, that all reverence for, and benefit by, his ministry is utterly to be despaired of, he may be removed. The want of success, otherwise, is not a sufficient cause of removal, but it is to be endured, with all humble patience by the minister, as a great affliction ; and, yet with this encouragement, that God will reward him, SECUDUM LABOREM, NON SECUNDUM PROVENTUM."

*§ 125. Second class of cases, authorizing removal.*

The second class of cases, in which a minister's connection with a particular church may be dissolved, appears to be founded on the principle, That there is a general good of the churches, which ought to be consulted in preference to the immediate prosperity of any particular church. Hence the claim of such particular church, although it may be to them a painful sacrifice, ought to yield to that of some public Religious Societies, of Theological Seminaries, and the like ; the success of which involves the interests of the churches at large.

" A pastor may be removed from his people, (say the before-mentioned PROPOSITIONS,) in case his translation be found necessary for the *common good*. The welfare of the catholic church, in the general edification of a community, should be of such weight, as to make any particular churches give way thereunto. But, yet it becomes not any minister, to seek his own translation, by first offering himself unto it."

*§ 126. Other occasions, authorizing a minister's departure.*

There are other circumstances or occasions of departure, such as the ill health of the minister, personal per-

secution, a failure of temporal supplies, &c.—“ There are some other things, (say the PROPOSITIONS,) which dissolve the *vinculum pastorale* between a pastor and his people; and in case those disasters happen, he may be removed. Thus if a minister have a tolerable subsistence, wherewith he may after a Christian manner provide for his own, denied him; or, if a minister have no way to avoid a storm of purely personal persecution, but by fleeing from one city to another; a remove may be justified. And the dissolution of a church gives the like liberty to him, that had been the shepherd of the now scattered flock.”

And again it is stated; “ Although a pastor should be willing to encounter many difficulties and infirmities with his people; yet, in case that chronical diseases, which evidently threaten his life, might hopefully be relieved by his removal, it should then, on all hands, be allowed and advised. Mercy is to be preferred before sacrifice, and so we find it was in the primitive churches accordingly.”

#### § 127. *Advice of a Council necessary in the removal of a minister.*

Although the causes, which have been mentioned, viz. alienation of the people’s affections, failure of health, insufficient support in temporal things, a scattered and disabled state of the particular church, and the prospect of greater usefulness to the church in general in some other situation, are considered good grounds for dissolving the pastoral connection; still it is not according to Usage for a minister to leave his people, without the advice and order of a Council. Accordingly it was determined in the Cambridge PROPOSITIONS as follows;—“ That the will of our Lord, about the removal of any pastor from

his people, may be understood, it is requisite, that the minister do not entirely assume to himself the judgment of his own call to remove, but a great regard must be had unto the direction of the churches of our Lord in the neighborhood."—This regard to the neighboring churches is shown in the usual way; viz. by inviting them to attend and express their opinions, on the subject of the proposed removal and the reasons of the same, by means of their pastors and delegates.

§ 128. *Further testimonies in favor of the preceding principle.*

The principle, however, that a Council is requisite in the removal of a minister, does not rest solely on the authority, which has been mentioned. It is expressly recognized in the doings of the Synod, assembled at Boston in 1662; who mention, as one of the acts of the communion of churches, the seeking and accepting of help from each other in the ordination, translation, and deposition of ministers.

The principle is fully stated and maintained in the ancient Ratio Disciplinæ, (Art. IX.) and in Dr. Increase Mather's Testimony to Good Order in the Churches. In 1719 the question of a minister's removal without Council was proposed to the Congregational ministers of Boston on an occasion of importance. The answer, signed by the well known names of Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, Wadsworth, Colman, Sewall, Prince, and Cooper, was this;

"We plainly and solemnly profess and declare, That we would not have this remove, [alluding to a minister's leaving a church with consent of the same but without Council,] to be quoted as an example or precedent, to encourage the like for time to come; because we look on

such removes of ordained ministers, as directly tending to unsettle and disquiet the churches, and greatly to hurt the interest of religion in the land.\*

*§ 129. Of the calling and the nature of the Council.*

Councils, in the case of a removal, are composed, as on other occasions, of pastors and delegates. The Council is called by the church by Letters Missive, sent in their name; but the minister, being an equal party to the business to be settled, has a right, if he chooses to exercise it, to name half of the churches sent to. In that case, it is technically called a Mutual Council.

According to Congregational Usage, the minister may not of himself call a Council in the first instance. It is according to Usage and manifestly just, that he should be allowed to judge of the propriety and necessity of that procedure. He can, therefore, request the church to call a Council; either a Mutual Council, or one composed of such churches, as they choose.

So long as the principle is maintained, that a Council is requisite in the removal of a minister, the church have no right to refuse such a request. In case they do, he is entitled, both on the principles of common practice and of common justice, to an Ex Parte Council.

*§ 130. Proceedings of the Dismissing Council.*

The church itself is considered competent to assume the task of inquiring into the particulars of the case, if

---

\* The principle, that a Council is necessary, at the Dismissal of a minister, is abundantly obvious; still cases of ministerial removal sometimes occur in disregard of it. The existence of such instances is alluded to in Mather's Account of the New England Discipline, Art. IX. though not as a matter to be justified;—"Sometimes, but rarely, a pastor and a people have with mutual agreement more privately parted with one another; and no further words have been made about it."

they see fit, and to vote a Dismission ; subject, however, to the revision and the approval, of a Council. Such a vote is desirable, when it can be had ; because the Council can hardly mistake as to their duty, when the two immediate parties to the contract concur in the justness and necessity of its dissolution. Nevertheless, if the parties are at variance on the subject, the Council are bound to act solely from a sense of duty ; whatever unpleasantness may be caused in the minds of some, who are concerned. A want of firmness and of inflexible integrity in Councils can hardly fail to lead to unhappy results. It is their duty to weigh seriously and carefully all the circumstances of the affair, proposed for their consideration ; not only those, which have occurred, but those, which are prospective.—“ If much scandal, (say the PROPOSITIONS,) will certainly ensue, upon the removal of a pastor from his people, *that* should weigh down many circumstances, which would rather invite such a removal.”

#### § 131. *Recommendation of pastors regularly dismissed.*

We have already seen at §§ 78, 79, that the churches have a right to know, who are introduced into the ministry, and in what manner they sustain its responsibilities. But the influence of the ministry is great, whether a man be limited to one spot, or labor from place to place, through the whole circuit of Christ’s vineyard. Hence some security to the churches is as necessary at the Dismissal of a minister, as when he was first licensed, or was settled. It is not enough, that the churches were consulted, either directly or indirectly, on the two latter occasions ; since the mere circumstance of a minister’s Dismissal has occasioned a new state of things, by attaching to him, (what otherwise might not

have existed,) a fear, that he may have come short of the duties of his station.

Hence it is usual for the Council, for the satisfaction of the religious public and consequently for the benefit of the individual himself, not only to dismiss, but to *recommend*. If the council conclude to dismiss, and nothing have appeared against the ministerial character of the pastor, the articles of Dismissal are to this effect;

*That the Council were assembled at the appointed time and place, agreeably to Letters Missive and for the purpose therein stated;—that they diligently and prayerfully considered the reasons, both in favor of and against the proposed dismissal;—that, having found the reasons in favor of the same satisfactory, they voted such dismission to be just and expedient;—and, therefore, they voted, that the pastor be dismissed accordingly and be recommended to the churches, wherever the Providence of God may call him, as a minister in regular standing.*

## CHAPTER FOURTEENTH.

### DISCIPLINING AND DEPOSING OF A MINISTER.

#### § 132. *Of the necessity of some means of disciplining ministers.*

After taking the precautions, which have been already mentioned, in introducing suitable persons into the ministry, sometimes improper men find their way into that work; and others lose that good character, which they once possessed. This is truly, what an ancient writer calls it, “a deplorable case”; but, he acknowledges it

sometimes to have happened, and it is therefore, to be provided against. The Congregational polity would be exceedingly defective, if there were not some means of bringing such unworthy ministers to an account.

The existence of such a defect in the Congregational, or in any other system, must be exceedingly prejudicial not only to the churches at large, but to the pastors themselves. If the infliction of censures be a benefit to private church members, there seems to be no good reason, why it should not be extended to members, who are called to sustain offices. "If admonition, and in some cases excommunication, (says Cotton, WAY OF THE CHURCHES IN NEW-ENGLAND, CH. V.) be ordinances of God, sanctified for the healing of the souls of God's people gone astray, it were a sacrilegious injury to the Elders to deprive them of the benefit of such wholesome medicines, when the state of their souls should come to stand in need thereof."

### § 133. *The minister amenable to his church.*

It is settled, both in principle and practice, that the minister is accountable to his church; and in the first place, *in virtue of his membership.*

According to Congregational Usage, no person becomes and remains the minister of a church, without also transferring his relationship and becoming a member of the same. The reasons of this are various; but one undoubtedly is, that he may feel himself subject to the needful restraint of its watch and discipline.

Independently of this, the minister is without doubt, amenable to his church, in the second place, *in virtue of his pastoral engagements.* It is no matter, whether those engagements are all expressed, or in part implied. As long as they truly exist, the pastor is bound by them; and

If he violates them, the church have a right to call him to account. It is the same here as in temporal and civil things, where no agreement or engagement is broken, without incurring a responsibility ; and the responsibility is due to the injured party. This is one of the plainest principles of moral justice. The church, therefore, if their minister fail to preach the Gospel, or to administer the sacraments, or otherwise come short of the duties and character, which he pledged as a pastor at his settlement, have a right to call him to account in virtue of his ministerial engagements.

#### *§ 134. Evidence of such accountability from the Scriptures.*

The liability of ministers to reproof and punishment from the particular churches, over which they are set, is not more agreeable to reason, than to the Scriptures. In reference to the discipline of the church, the Apostle repeatedly lays down the obvious practical principle, that the existence of even a small evil, will, if not corrected, spread itself, and at last corrupt the whole body ; "*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.*" 1 Cor. v. 6. Gal. v. 9.

This principle he applies, on different occasions, both to the treatment of lay members and of ministers. If a private church member, who is corrupt, ought to be brought under discipline ; then much more a church member, who sustains the ministerial office. The Apostle, in the fifth chapter of Galatians, speaks of false teachers, who troubled that church. In reference to these false teachers, he repeats the maxim of the whole lump and the little leaven ; and immediately adds, "*I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded, but he, that troubleth you shall bear*

*His judgment, whosoever he be ;*" as much as to say, He firmly believed, the Galatian brethren would bring such persons to account and to punishment, whatever might be their pretensions, adding, in the next verse but one, "*I would they were even cut off, which trouble you.*"

The Apostle also authorises the church at Colopse, (Coloss. iv. 17,) to watch over and to exhort their pastor, "*And say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry, which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.*"

Even the Apostle Peter was called to an account before the brethren of Jerusalem, Acts xi. 2—18. And it does not appear, that he plead an exemption from this accountability on account of his being an Apostle and a minister; but willingly gave them satisfaction.\*

#### § 135. *Methods or progress of disciplining a minister.*

This doctrine, that the power of calling its minister to an account rests with the church, is recognized, with a restriction hereafter to be mentioned, in the Platform at the tenth chapter, § 6. It is still more fully and explicitly asserted in Cotton's Way of the Churches in New-England, ch. V. § 4; in Cotton's Book of the Keys, chs. II. IV.; in the Answer to XXXII. Questions at Question thirteenth; and in Chapter fourth of Samuel

---

\* Both in Samuel Mather's Apology and in the New England Discipline of Cotton Mather, his father, the power of the churches under consideration is maintained, besides other arguments, from the practice of the primitive churches; that is to say, the churches in the three first centuries. They adduce in particular a passage from Clement's Epistle to the Corinthian church. It appears from the passage referred to, that the Corinthians had deposed their ministers; and their right to do so is not doubted in the Epistle, although they are charged with having acted precipitately and wrongly in that particular case. In the year 258, a Synod, of which Cyprian was president, expressly acknowledged and commended the proceedings of some churches which had recently deposed their bishops. (See Cotton Mather's New England Discipline, Art. IX. and Samuel Mather's Apology, Chap. IV.)

Mather's Apology; not to mention other written authorities, and the undoubted testimony of Usage.

The question of the power of the church in this respect being thus recognized, the next inquiry relates to the course or method, which the church shall pursue on an occasion of so much interest. The general principle, subject to the limitations arising out of the peculiarity of the case, is, that the church are to take the same steps as in the discipline of an offending lay-brother,—“Wherefore, (says Mather's RAT. Disc. Art. IX.) when a pastor has fallen into scandal, the brethren that are acquainted with it, proceed, as they would with another brother in such cases; only with such special terms of respect and repetition of address, as the relation of a father may call for.”

#### § 136. *Further considerations on this subject.*

If, therefore, a minister do not so conduct in his office of pastor, as might reasonably and justly be expected, it seems to be the duty of those individuals of the church, who are aggrieved, to seek satisfaction, in the first instance, in a private interview. If their scruples be then solved, they are not, in ordinary cases, under obligations to pursue the inquiry further; since others have the same obvious and scriptural resource as themselves.

If, on the other hand, satisfaction cannot be had in this way, the subject of grievance, after a repeated attempt to obtain a redress of it, which is to be made in the presence of others, may be brought before the church. If the church, after a full hearing of the case and with suitable examination, are satisfied either of the falsity of the charges or of the sincerity of the offender's repentance, there is no good cause for further proceeding. But if satisfaction be not given, the church, when consider-

ed in itself and as disconnected from other churches, possesses the right, and is bound in duty to admonish and suspend him from their fellowship.

Nothing is supposed to be more evident than this principle, that the church possesses the right, and is obliged to punish, when considered in the abstract. Nevertheless, as such a step would be virtually removing the accused person from the ministerial office, it is not according to Congregational Usage for the aggrieved church to take that measure, without the advice of neighboring churches.

#### ¶ 137. *Advice of Council in the discipline of a pastor.*

This is the natural result of one of those fundamental principles, emphatically declared by the Congregationalists at their first setting out, as a distinct sect; viz. The churches, although they originally possess in themselves a constituting and preserving power, and are all on an equal footing, are, nevertheless, not independent, but, on the contrary, sustain a mutual relationship and interest, (See §§ 17, 20.)

The language of the Platform on this subject, (ch. X. § 6,) is this; "In case an elder offend incorrigibly, the matter so requiring, as the church had power to call him to office, so they have power according to order, (*the counsel of other churches, where it may be had, directing thereto,*) to remove him from his office.—This is the restriction on the proceedings of the particular church, alluded to in § 135, founded on the principle, that all the churches of Christ have an interest in each other, and, therefore, ought to be consulted in matters of great concernment; among which may be justly reckoned the settlement, removal, and deposing of ministers.

This course, which recommends itself as a matter of

common prudence, is advocated, on scripture grounds, in Cotton's Book of the Keys at chapter IV. It was also considered and approved in the Synod of delegates and pastors in 1662 ; as it has been by writers, councils, and general usage since that time.

### § 138. *Proceedings and results of the Council.*

The Council organizes itself as in other cases. Generally the meetings are public in the first instance; but after such testimony as can be had, is given, they withdraw to private consultations.

They there come to a result; and if they find the offender guilty, they still allow him the opportunity of retaining his standing by suitable manifestations of repentance. And if the Council be satisfied in that respect, they advise the dissatisfied brethren to restore him their confidence.

"If the offender be obstinate, (says Mather's RAT. Disc. Art. IX.) then they sharply rebuke him; and in a written instrument, signed by the Moderator and all the Council, (or by him in the name of the Council,) they pronounce him unworthy of the Christian ministry."— The same work adds, "The Council, returning to the public assembly, there after suitable speeches made by the Moderator, (and others of the Council, if they please) the RESULT of the Council is read, and then delivered to one of the brethren, at whose invitation they are here together. And pertinent prayers are added for the close of all."

### § 139. *Of the testimony adduced against a pastor.*

It is highly reasonable that the trial of a minister should be instituted and conducted, with the utmost regard and

deference to his station. Not because any office whatever ought to shield from the punishment of crime ; but for the well known reason, that persons in office, who faithfully discharge their duty, are exposed more than others to malevolent and unfounded accusations.

This principle is clearly sanctioned and enforced by the Scriptures, 1 Tim. v. 19 ; “ *Against an Elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.* ”

Some difference of opinion seems to have existed as to the true import of the passage, but the meaning is generally understood to be this ; That two persons must be had, who can testify to the particular fact, which is the ground of accusation.

#### § 140. *Of the deposed minister's relation to the church.*

After a minister has been deposed by a Council, he still remains a member of the church. Therefore it is the duty of the church after that event to proceed with him, as with any private member. They are to consider whether the reasons which have deposed him from the ministry, are inconsistent with christian character in any mere layman ; and if they be, whether he exhibit penitence or not. “ Being now, (says the Platform CH. X. § 6.) but a member, in case he adds contumacy to his sin, the church that had power to receive him into their fellowship, hath also the same power to cast him out, that they have concerning any other member.”

#### § 141. *Subordinate means of pastoral discipline.*

There are other means besides those which have been mentioned, of calling ministers to an account. Generally they are members of some clerical Association ; and as

these bodies are formed on religious principles and for religious objects, those members, who act inconsistently with those principles and objects, necessarily expose themselves to reproof and censure. It may be added, it would be the duty of the Association, if the delinquencies were such as to affect the Christian character, to inform the church under the person's charge.

The Association, that licensed to preach in the first instance, may exercise a watch and control over the licensed person until his Ordination. But it has been thought by some, although the question does not seem to be fully settled, that the power of the licensing Association is superseded and annulled by the act of the Ordaining Council, inducting him into the ministry. If the contrary principle were established, that the licensing Association retained its power as much after, as before the Ordination, it would undoubtedly strengthen the safeguards of the ministerial character and influence.

#### §. 142. *Duty of neighboring Churches in the case of neglecting discipline.*

Sometimes churches sinfully permit the existence of a corrupt ministry ; not taking means to prevent it.—They thereby expose themselves, as in the case of the allowed corruption of the inferior members, to the friendly advice, and the discipline of neighboring churches. The practice, relative to cases of this nature, is thus stated in Cotton's *Way of the Churches of Christ in New-England*, Chap. vi. § 6 :

“ A sixth way of communion among our churches is by way of *admonition* ; as if one church should be creditably given to understand of some scandal, arising in another church, whether by corruption in doctrine or in manners ; and upon diligent search and inquiry, the report is

found true, the church hearing thereof, sendeth letters or messengers or both unto the Elders of that church, where such offence is found, and exhorteth them to take a speedy and diligent course for the redress thereof.

But if the Elders of that church should *be remiss therein, or be faulty themselves*, they then certify the whole church thereof, to call upon their officers, as Paul sent to the church of Colosse, to call upon Archippus, to take diligent heed of the fulfilling of that work of the ministry, which he had received of the Lord, Col. iv. 17. If the church hear them, the scandal is removed ; if it hear them not, the church, offended herewith, taketh the help of two or three churches more to join with them in their exhortation or admonition."

§ 143. *Further proceedings of neighboring churches in the above case.*

"If still the church, where the offence lieth, persists in the neglect of their duty, and of the counsel of their brethren ; either the matter would be referred to a congregation of many, or all the churches together, if need require. Or else, if the offence be evident and weighty, and of ill, though not general consequence, the churches, offended with them, would, as they justly might, withdraw themselves from the right hand of fellowship, and so forbear all such exercises of mutual brotherly communion with them, which all the churches are wont to walk in one towards another," &c.

**CHAPTER FIFTEENTH.****COUNCILS.**

§ 144. *Acts of church communion, according to the Synod of 1662.*

Councils and Conferences of which we shall hereafter have occasion to treat more particularly, are founded on the general principle, already repeatedly mentioned, that there is and ought to be a COMMUNION of churches. In the Synod of Congregationalists of 1662, the communion of churches is defined to be the faithful improvement, according to capacity and opportunity, of the gifts of Christ, bestowed upon them, for his service and glory, and their mutual good and edification. The acts of communion, they assert, are such as these;—I. Hearty care and prayer one for another, 2 Cor. xi. 28, Canticles viii. 8, Rom. i. 9, Col. i. 9, Eph. vi. 18;

II. Affording relief by communication of their gifts in temporal or spiritual necessities, Rom. xv. 26, 27, Acts xi. 22—29, 2 Cor. viii. 1, xi. 14;

III. Maintaining unity and peace, by giving an account one to another of their public actions, when it is orderly desired, Acts xi. 2, 3, 4, 18, Josh. xxii. 13, 21, 30, 1 Cor. x. 32, and strengthening one another in their regular administrations; as in special by a concurrent testimony against persons justly censured, Acts v. 41, xvi. 4, 5, 2 Tim. iv. 15, 2 Thess. iii. 14;

IV. Seeking and accepting help from, and giving help unto each other in case of divisions and contentions whereby the peace of any church is disturbed, Acts xv.

2.—in matters of more than ordinary importance, as the ordination, translation, and deposition of elders, and such like, Prov. xv. 22, xxiv. 6, 1 Tim. v. 22,—in doubtful and difficult questions and controversies, doctrinal or practical, that may arise Acts xv. 2, 6,—and in the rectifying of mal-administrations, and healing of errors and scandals, that are unhealed among themselves, Job iii. 9, 10, 1 Cor. xv. 2 Cor. ii. 6, 11, xii. 20, 21, xiii. 2 ;

V. Taking notice, in love and faithfulness, of the troubles and difficulties, errors and scandals of another church, and administering help; when the case necessarily calls for it, though they should so neglect their own good and duty, as not to seek it, Exod. xxiii. 4, 5. Prov. xxiv. 11, 12 ;

VI. Admonishing one another, when there is need and cause for it, and after due means with patience used, withdrawing from a church or peccant party therein, which obstinately persists in error or scandal.

*§ 145. Of the obligation of the churches to seek advice.*

The objects proposed in the three first classes of acts of communion, may in general be effectually and happily accomplished in that plan of stated intercourse, termed Conference of Churches. The objects, proposed under the fourth, fifth, and sixth classes, imply and require the existence of Councils.

And it is to be added, that it is not left wholly at the option of the churches, whether they will call a Council under the circumstances therein mentioned. So far from it, if they neglect, in cases of evident necessity, to consult with neighboring churches by way of Council, it is considered matter of just offence to them. This is explicitly stated in the Platform, Chap. xv. § 2.—“ If a

church be rent with divisions among themselves, or lie under any open scandal, and yet refuse to consult with other churches for healing or removing of the same, it is matter of just offence both to the Lord Jesus and to other churches; as betraying too much want of mercy and faithfulness, not to seek to bind up the breaches and wounds of the church and brethren."

But, on the other hand, there may be too great eagerness and precipitancy in assembling Councils, which is an error hardly less, than the one here objected to. Some remarks remain to be made in a subsequent section on the views and feelings, with which such a proceeding should be commenced.

#### *§ 146. Of the persons composing Councils.*

Councils are to be composed of ministers, and of lay-members of brethren of the churches. The formation of Councils on this plan is deemed to be agreeable to the genius of the Christian system, which, in recognizing the rights of all, opposes itself to the exclusive right and the domination of any particular class, (see § 73.)—And it may be added, that it is not only agreeable to the general spirit of Christianity, but is particularly and explicitly authorized.

The Council of Jerusalem, of which we have an account in the fifteenth chapter of Acts, was composed of ministers and private brethren. It is true, that the church of Antioch, on whose account that Council was called, deputed Paul and Barnabas to go to the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem, without making mention of any other class of persons. But on their arrival we find, that they were received not only by the Apostles and the Elders of the church, but by the church itself. The business on which the messengers came to Antioch, was discussed in

the presence of the whole body of believers; and the result which was agreed upon, and is left on record, is not only in the name of the Apostles and Elders, but of the *brethren*.

§ 147. *Ancient testimonies on this subject.*

Without undertaking to repeat all, that has been said by the early writers on this subject, it will be sufficient to remark, that the principle in question is repeatedly recognized in Cotton's Way of the Churches of Christ in New-England, printed in 1645, at Chap. VI. §§ 3, 4. It was also admitted and sanctioned by the Synod of 1646—8, who were the authors of the Cambridge Platform, at Chapter sixteenth of that instrument. And again, in the Synod of 1679, the feelings, evinced in relation to this subject, were particularly marked and explicit, in consequence of certain members appearing there, unattended by any of the brethren of the churches, of which they had charge. The Synod immediately noticed it, and were so much dissatisfied, that they would not recognize them as members, and permit them to take their seat, until they had first prevailed with their churches to send a delegation of lay-members.

"Councils and Synods, (says the more recent Apology of Samuel Mather, Chap. VII.) should be composed of such persons, as are fit and proper, both of the eldership and of the laity; and both have equal right to speak their sentiments in them." And again he says, in a few sentences after, "When a number of pious, skilful, and prudent persons, both ministers and brethren, are sent and convened in Council or Synod, they ought to have equal power and authority in acting and voting; this is the right of the fraternity."

**§ 148. *Of those who have the right of calling Councils.***

Councils are summoned by means of LETTERS MISSIVE, addressed to a number of churches, and stating the object, in reference to which their deliberations are solicited. (See §§ 33, 71.) The right of sending LETTERS for this end is possessed by whole churches; and in certain circumstances by aggrieved members forming a part of a church, as also aggrieved individuals. As each member is bound to feel an interest in the whole, so on the other hand the whole body are bound to regard the rights and well-being of each member; and on this principle even individuals, however obscure they may be, are entitled to the protection of Councils, those bodies being the only authorized means of representing the church at large, in the Cases IV. V. VI. of the Synod of 1662, mentioned at § 144. Letters Missive are also sent by the agents of Missionary Societies, in the name of such Societies, as remarked at § 92; inasmuch as those bodies are deemed to be acting in the name and behalf of all the churches. Also a number of individuals in a new settlement, who are not members of a church, but give credible evidence of piety, and wish to be united in a church state, may call a Council for that purpose.—(See §§ 24, 33.)

**§ 149. *Obligation of the churches to regard Letters Missive.***

If the bodies and individuals above-named have a right to send, the churches are bound to accede to their request, right and obligation being reciprocal. Still as the application is always supposed to be a reasonable one, and for some religious end, if they have satisfactory evidence, that this is not the case, they are released from that obli-

gation. And hence they first vote, on receiving the Letter Missive, and before choosing their Delegates, whether they will meet in Council or not.

It is hardly necessary to add, that the churches do not notice Letters Missive, sent either by individuals or corporations, acting merely in a civil capacity, or for civil or secular ends.\*

**§ 150. *Of the feelings with which Councils should be called.***

Sometimes churches and others neglect to call Councils, when they should; but not less frequently there is too great precipitancy in calling them. Such a course ought never to be taken, without a deliberate and conscientious regard to all the possible results. It is equally at variance with common honesty and religion for a church or part of a church, to ask the advice of a Council, when they have determined beforehand the course to be pursued, whatever the character of that advice may be. If they are certain of being in the right, it is palpable deception to seek that aid, of which they are conscious of not standing in need. But if this be not the case, they virtually admit the possibility of being in an error.

Now if persons confess it possible for them to be in the wrong or liable to take a wrong course in future, and ask advice in relation to their conduct, they are certainly under obligations, strictly to follow that advice, in some things, and in all cases to regard it with the greatest deference.—Hence Councils are not to be called, until after much deliberation, and with a serious determination, that the truth shall have its due influence on the conscience

---

\* There are some valuable remarks on the topics of this Section to be found in the Statement of the Dedham Case and Considerations on Congregational Polity, pp. 56, 57.

and conduct, at whatever expense of prejudice and interest.

**§ 151. *Principles on which Councils are to decide.***

The ground or foundation of the existence of the Council is the wish or invitation given, as made known in the Letter Missive. It is true, the Council cannot be formed without the approbation and concurrent action of the churches, which are sent to on the occasion. But it has been justly remarked, that the act of the churches, in voting to comply with the request and send delegates to form constituent parts of the Council, is rather the medium, through which the Council is brought into being, than the originating cause.

Hence the Council are limited in their proceedings and powers by the Letter Missive. Being called by its authors for a particular purpose and no other, and being authorised to act by their respective churches for the same purpose, they are bound to keep that particular object in view in all their transactions. As to the rest, they may consult the written opinions of men and derive light from various sources, but are to be governed chiefly by the Scriptures and their own consciences. Justice can hardly fail to be secured, where a regard to God's Word and the teachings of the Spirit is united with candor and prudence, even without the voluminous aid of a pile of recorded precedents, which these churches generally are in want of.

**§ 152. *Of the weight due to the advice of Councils.***

It is an acknowledged principle in respect to Councils, that they possess only advisory powers, in other words, their decisions are addressed to the understandings and consciences of men, and are enforced solely by

moral obligations. They are considered by the churches as interpretors or expositors of what is right, expediency, and duty in the particular cases submitted to them. Their proper business is to GIVE LIGHT.

Nevertheless, as those, by whom they were called, are supposed to have been sincere in their request, it is incumbent on them to examine the opinions or decisions given, with prayerful, honest, and unprejudiced minds. When their temper is such, they will generally find good reason to agree with the Council.

In the beginning, such bodies were so judiciously constituted and their decisions so respectfully received, as to have extorted the remark from Cotton Mather, that The Councils in the churches of New England rarely meet with contradictions from the churches, whose cases have been laid before them. In case a church, or part of a church refuse a Council's opinion, the neighboring churches have a right to judge of the propriety of their course, and to censure and withdraw from them, if there be good reason for so doing. (See Platform, Chap. XV.)

§ 153. *Advice of Council in matters merely prudential.*

The decisions of Councils are in all cases termed ADVICE; and abstractly considered, are susceptible of being either received or rejected. But this power of receiving or rejecting, although admitted to exist in the abstract, is necessarily checked and controlled in practice by the principles of our moral constitution. Consequently it may be laid down as a principle, that there are cases, where moral considerations imperatively require the Advice of Councils to be followed, although the abstract power of resisting it is admitted to remain. And

such seem to be all matters of mere expedience or prudence.

Perhaps the question, submitted to the Council, is, Whether a person may leave a church, in order to join another, whose meetings are in some respects more accessible. This is a mere prudential question ; a matter, not of conscience, but of expediency. The Council may see reasons not to grant the request of the applicant ; and if so, he is bound to abide their advice ; otherwise he was not sincere, he was not honest in asking it. It is admitted, he has power, (what may be termed the *physical* power,) to reject it ; but it seems to be equally clear, that he cannot do it, without a violation of morality.

#### § 154. *Advice of Council in matters of conscience.*

But there are other cases of a different character ; and such are all matters of conscience ; involving not merely a person's desires, but his sense of duty. When a man's conscience is concerned, it is true he asks Advice, as in the other case ; but in respect to the applicants for it, the same consequences do not follow the Advice given. In the one case, the nature of the application is such as to lay the applicant under a moral obligation to adopt the Advice of the Council, supposing him sincere in his request. In the other it is not so ; nor is it possible, that it should be. An unreserved reference of matters of conscience to another person or any body of persons, is repugnant to the Scriptures, which make our consciences amenable to God alone. It is also repugnant to the nature of the human mind ; since we are so formed, that neither the power of belief, nor the moral susceptibility can possibly operate, except on evidence being presented.

Consequently, in all such cases, when the Advice is given, the applicant, while he is bound to examine and

weigh it seriously, must be the judge, whether his scruples are cleared up, or not. If they are, he is bound to pursue the course pointed out ; if not, he is forbidden by a higher obligation.

## CHAPTER SIXTEENTH.

### MUTUAL COUNCILS.

#### § 155. *Occasions of calling Mutual Councils.*

It will hold good as a general statement, that mutual Ecclesiastical Councils are called only in cases of doubt and difficulty ; and in respect to which there exists some difference of opinion. The particular cases, therefore, in which they are summoned, (at least those of most frequent occurrence,) are these three ; viz. The dissolution of the pastoral relation, where a removal is contemplated, which the church does not assent to ;<sup>\*</sup> Cases of controversy in general between a church and its pastor ; Cases of controversy between a church and a private member, or members respecting removal, discipline, and the like.

#### § 156. *Practice in selecting the Council and Letter Missive.*

In other cases, such as the ordination or installation of a minister, there is but one party, the Council being convoked by the church as a body. That is to say, the

\* Wherefore, (says Increase Mather, in his TESTIMONY to Good Order in the Churches, p. 4,) if a minister be upon a removal from his flock, especially when there are no sufficient causes evident for it, and the flock earnestly propound and request, that the thing may be laid before a Council of the neighbor churches, but he refuse it, it may be feared, that it is an hour of temptation with him, and that his way is not right before the Lord.

arrangements, relative to the calling of the Council, are determined solely by the majority of votes, although the minority if there be one, have the right of making their statements and remonstrances, when it is convened.

But occasions, calling for the formation of Mutual Councils, are always understood to imply the existence of two parties, which sustain to each other such a relation, as to render it expedient to deviate from the common practice. It has, therefore, become the usage, unless some other plan be especially agreed upon with mutual satisfaction, for each of the parties concerned to select an equal number of the churches, which are invited to the Council, together with an additional church, if it be thought advisable, selected by the two parties conjointly.

Nevertheless, the LETTERS MISSIVE in these cases, as in others, are sent by the church. "If the church, (says the Ancient Ratio Disciplinæ, Art. IX. § 1,) think it advisable for them to have their share in choosing and calling the Council, the LETTERS then go in their name, signed by the pastor."

#### § 157. *Mutual Councils representative of the whole body of the Churches.*

There is one view of Mutual Councils, which is important to be kept in mind, viz. That they are representative of the whole body of the churches. This we suppose to be the proper view of all regular Councils, but emphatically so of those under consideration. Dr. Owen, in his Brief Instruction in the Worship and Discipline of the Churches, (p. 227, ed. 1667,) asserts, that those, who are rightly and justly censured in any church, ought to be rejected by all churches whatever; and offers the mutual communion of the churches as the ground

and reason of the assertion. But if the just act of a particular church ought to be thus regarded by all others, certainly the acts of the assembly of churches, which we call a Council ought to be still more.

The offender or aggrieved person therefore, declines listening to the church of which he is a member ; and accordingly makes his appeal to the churches at large, requesting of them to decide, whether the treatment he has received be just or not. But as such an appeal cannot, from the nature of the case, be literally carried into effect, the churches assembled in Mutual Council, are held to be virtually representative of all the rest. We may consider the plan of Mutual Councils as the method, which has been seriously and carefully fixed upon, for securing this general representation in all cases, which cannot be otherwise settled. Consequently their Advice is in theory the advice of the whole body of Congregationalists, and is to be regarded as such in practice.

### § 158. *Mutual Councils are ultimate tribunals.*

The Advice, therefore, of Mutual Councils, supposing the opinions of the last section to be correct, cannot be disregarded and rejected without injury and offence to the whole body of believers of the same name, except it be done on the most serious and conscientious grounds. And whether rejected or not, it is the decision of the highest and ultimate ecclesiastical tribunal; and is not susceptible, as is often done in civil cases, of being rejudged by an appeal to another, and more authoritative body.\*

---

\* This statement will apply to the great body of the Congregational churches ; but in respect to those of Connecticut must be modified by the Saybrook Articles. Their Mutual Council is the Consociation ; nevertheless, the decision of a single Consociation, on the sub-

§ 159. *Consociated or permanent mutual Councils.*

It seems proper to observe here, that the great liberty, enjoyed in these churches, has resulted in an absence of perfect uniformity in their proceedings. In some parts of the American Congregational Church, particularly in the State of Connecticut, the plan of Occasional Councils, summoned on each particular occurrence, has been, in a great measure, given up ; and standing or permanent councils, technically called Consociations, established in their stead. As these bodies exist, antecedently to the particular causes and occasions, which call them into being, they are entitled to be considered Mutual Councils ; and, therefore, rightly come under consideration in this chapter.

Consociations are composed of certain neighboring churches, (generally those, that happen to be embraced within the limits of a County,) which are permanently represented in the same, by their respective ministers and by lay-delegates, chosen from time to time. The authority, vested in Consociations, has its origin in the Saybrook articles, which are given at No. II. of the Appendix. According to those articles, they are required to afford assistance on all ecclesiastical occasions ; and their powers appear to be of a more decisive and authoritative kind, than those of occasional councils.

§ 160. *Of the authority or powers of consociations.*

That such is the nature of the powers, granted to Consociations, seems to be sufficiently evident from the language of the Saybrook Articles, which are alike the foun-

---

ject submitted to them, is not always final. In cases of great difficulty, (Art. VII.) it is referred to a fuller council, consisting of a joint assembly of the Consociation, before which the subject was originally brought, and a neighbouring Consociation.

dation of their existence, and of the authority, conferred upon them.—“ All cases of scandal, (says the thirteenth article,) that fall out within the circuit of the aforesaid Consociations, shall be brought to a council of the elders and also messengers of the churches within the said circuit.”

The decisions of Consociated Councils, which extend not only to lay men, but ministers, are not mere ADVICE, as in other cases ; but are decisive of the subject, submitted to their consideration, and are enforced by a high moral penalty. According to the sixth article of the Saybrook Platform, if any pastor or church decline conforming to the decision of the Consociation, they shall be reputed, after due patience used with them, “ guilty of a scandalous contempt, and dealt with, as the rule of God’s word in such case doth provide, and the sentence of non-communion shall be declared against pastor and church.”

Some difference of opinion seems to have existed in respect to the thirteenth Article ; but the settled usage is to this effect. When a minister is guilty of scandal or heresy and the like, the accusation is brought, in the first instance, before the Association of which he is a member. The Association are to receive it, and to make provision for the minister’s trial before the Consociation ; nor does the Council, otherwise called the Consociation, take cognizance of it, except it be brought in this way.\*

---

\* It seems to be necessary to add here a remark, explanatory of what has been formerly said. The principles and practice, which have been laid down in a former chapter in respect to the disciplining of a minister, apply to a large majority of the Congregational churches ; but not in their full extent to those, which have adopted the plan of permanent or Consociated instead of occasional Councils. The methods of proceeding and the principles, in the churches last referred to, may be found in the Saybrook Articles, given at No. II. of the Appendix ; with the exception of some things peculiar, which exist in the practice of a few small districts.

**§ 161. *Historical Remarks on Consociations.***

The circumstances, relative to the origin of Consociations, are briefly these.—About the commencement of the last century considerable dissatisfaction existed among the Congregational churches, especially on the part of the ministers, with the System of occasional Councils. The subject of Councils had not been fully and explicitly laid down in the Cambridge Platform, which was the great law of the churches; and a vague notion was very generally afloat, that something better might be substituted for them. Accordingly at the Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Convention of Ministers in May, 1706, a System of permanent Mutual Councils was proposed, and adopted, as far as that body was concerned, under the name of Consociations. But it experienced the animadversions of a number of able and influential pastors; and was particularly held up to rebuke, in a publication of Mr. Wise of Ipswich, entitled *The Church's Quarrel Espoused, or a Reply to certain Proposals, &c.* The plan was revived, under a somewhat different form in the year 1815, in the Massachusetts General Association. But in neither instance did it meet with the concurrence of the churches generally, and was, therefore, abandoned.

The result was not the same in Connecticut. Ministers and delegates from the counties of Hartford, Fairfield, New London, and New Haven, assembled at Saybrook in September of 1708. They agreed on a System of Consociations or permanent Mutual Councils instead of the plan of occasional Mutual and Ex parte Councils. These Articles, although they relate chiefly to Associations of ministers and the powers and methods of Consociations, are commonly known under the name of the

Saybrook Platform ; and in general the Congregational churches of Connecticut have been regulated by it in respect to Councils to this day. (See No. II. Appendix.)

§ 162. *Objections to permanent or Consociated Councils.*

As repeatedly ineffectual attempts have been made to establish the system of permanent Councils beyond the limits of Connecticut and Rhode Island, it seems proper to notice some of the objections, which have been made to a plan, in favor of which its friends assert very much can be said.

(1) It is objected, first, that the system is unfavorable to the rights of individuals and churches; and, therefore, inconsistent with the grounds, on which Congregationalists first set out. If individuals or churches do not submit to the Council's decision, according to the Saybrook plan, they expose themselves to the highest moral punishment, that of excommunication ; however conscientious they may be. This is thought by some to be not wholly in unison with the fundamental Congregational principle, that the Bible and a man's conscience are his ultimate law. Besides, the files of precedents, which are accumulated in the records of such Councils, are not known to the churches generally ; nor are the churches suitably consulted in the formation of the same, although they are to be governed by them.

A second objection is, that they tend to foster feelings of pride, and place, and power, the seeds of which are so deeply implanted in our corrupt nature.—On this subject Ecclesiastical History in all its stages teaches a lesson, which has been too dearly purchased, to be lightly regarded, or readily forgotten. It appears from Mosheim, (Volume I.) that in the second century the churches

were independent of each other except in the bonds of mutual prayer, love, and beneficence. Afterwards the churches of whole provinces were formed into one large and standing Ecclesiastical body, possessed of certain powers; such as making laws or canons, obligatory on particular churches. In due season, the officers of these formidable bodies claimed for themselves epithets of honor, prerogatives, and observances, of particular respect, in virtue of said office; and thus arose, not to mention other significant titles, Metropolitans, Patriarchs, and Popes.

This is the natural result, say these objectors, of giving permanent power to any body of men. Men accumulate power, as they do riches; the larger the heap, the more likely it is to grow. Therefore, it is best to stand upon First Principles, and to endure any defects of occasional Councils, rather than encounter the hidden, but certain hazards of those, which are permanent.

#### § 163. *Objections to Councils, which are not permanent.*

On the other hand, it is said, that lay-members have a part in the Councils of Consociations, and therefore, as they are particularly interested in preserving the rights of individuals and churches, the fears of some future unjust domination on the part of pastors are exaggerated. And while the alarms sounded in respect to Consociations, are groundless, the supporters of them insist, that the advantages they possess over Occasional Mutual Councils, are obvious. The former know the questions, submitted to them, but know not the parties; while the latter are truly and avowedly the creatures of parties.— And hence it often happens, as the parties naturally select the churches which they suppose to be favorable to themselves, that they are equally or nearly equally divi-

ded ; come to no decision ; or form a decision, which is weakened and deprived of its due effects by the suspicion of the interference of private motives. But Consociations, being permanently constituted, are rightly supposed to be free from any undue bias ; and their decisions are, therefore, entitled to the greater weight.

§ 164. *Of the progress and improvement of the Congregational system.*

On this subject a single remark remains to be made. The system of Order and Government of the Congregational churches was not adopted at once, but gradually, as the leadings of Providence, the teaching of prayer, and the searching of the Scriptures opened the way. And when we remember, how they have thus been led, from one step to another, in the introduction of a system in so many respects unexceptionable, we may indulge the hope, that on the subject under consideration, the churches will at last find the right way, and be united in the same practice. May we not anticipate, that the system of Church-Conferences, which was so early and earnestly proposed by the fathers of these churches, although but recently introduced, will diminish the obstacles in the way of a satisfactory and uniform arrangement in respect to Councils ? And as the Congregational churches of America often met together in former times in Synods, to consult on the general welfare, why may they not unite again in the same way, to examine, unite, and revise their generally excellent Order and Government ?

**CHAPTER SEVENTEENTH.****EX PARTE COUNCILS.****§ 165. *Of the nature of Ex-Parte Councils.***

Another tribunal, that of Ex-Parte Councils, is known among the great body of Congregationalists. In those sections of these churches, where permanent Councils are established, there is not supposed to be that occasion for them, as in other parts, and they are rarely, if ever resorted to. Like mutual Councils, they imply the existence of two parties ; but they differ in this, that they are called by one of the parties without the concurrence of the other.

An Ex-Parte Council, therefore, is an ecclesiastical tribunal assembled by an aggrieved individual or a number of aggrieved individuals, to sit as judges in their own case.—In the settlement of secular difficulties, we find something analogous to Mutual Councils in those mutually constituted tribunals, denominated *References* ; but an Ex-parte adjudication is an anomaly in civil government.

**§ 166. *Circumstances that warrant an aggrieved person or persons in calling an Ex-Parte Council.***

It sometimes happens, that a person is injured, in consequence of some application refused, or some censure passed by the church, or in some other way. Such a person is said to be aggrieved ; but he has a remedy. “The person aggrieved, (says Mather, RAT. DISC. ART. IX. § 1,) applies himself to the pastor, and by him to the

church with humble remonstrances of the hardships, which he apprehends used upon him, desiring them to review his case, and if this do not obtain, then to accommodate him in calling a Council of neighbour churches, chosen with mutual satisfaction, to judge of the proceedings.—If they refuse to do it, he may do it without them, only still informing them what he does.

He writes LETTERS to what churches in the neighbourhood he pleases; briefly declaring, that he apprehends himself to suffer by an administration, that needs to be more thoroughly inquired into; and intreating the Pastors with the Delegates of the churches, to whom he now makes his address to come to the place, and at the time specified in the LETTERS, and consider the case, whereof a full representation shall then and there be laid before them; and give their ADVICE, which he hopes will be with all sincerity and humility hearkened to."

§ 167. *Duty of the Churches, summoned to an Ex-Parte Council.*

It being settled, as it clearly is, that an aggrieved individual or individuals have a right to direct Letters Missive for the purpose of assembling an Ex-par<sup>e</sup>te Council, it becomes the duty of the churches, to which they are addressed, to assemble accordingly, unless they see reasons for not thus doing. As, however, the request is made against the opinion and wishes of a majority of the church, it becomes the churches, that are sent to, seriously to inquire, whether there be good grounds for meeting together. In case of a Mutual or any other Council, deliberation on this point is reasonable; in respect to Ex-par<sup>e</sup>te Councils, it is imperative. So much so, that the subject arrested the attention of the General Association of Massachusetts, and that highly respect-

ed body at their session of 1823, passed the following vote; That it be recommended to the ministers, connected with this Association, not to attend Ex-par<sup>t</sup>e Councils, without much deliberation, and obvious and urgent necessity.\*

§ 168. *An Ex-par<sup>t</sup>e allowable only on the refusal of a Mutual Council.*

One point in particular is to be noticed by the churches sent to. They have a right to expect, that it be explicitly stated in the Letters Missive, whether a Mutual Council has been requested and refused; or not. If such statement do not appear in the Letter Missive, the USAGE of the churches would not approve of their assembling.

A Mutual Council is the regular and ultimate tribunal. To such a council the aggrieved person or persons have a right. It is only in case of the refusal of their application for such an one, that they have a right to an Ex-par<sup>t</sup>e Council. The latter tribunal is designed only for their security in cases of necessity; but not to support them in any violation of wholesome and established practice.

---

\* The following passage from the New England Brethren's RATIO DISCIPLINÆ sufficiently indicates, that increased care was very early deemed to be necessary in respect to the calling of Ex-par<sup>t</sup>e Councils.—“The pastors of the churches, to whom an aggrieved person, under the neglect of the church to do any thing for the relief of his distress, has made his complaints, do not rashly at once read his Letters to their churches. But having informed themselves, as thoroughly as they can of the case, they signify unto the pastor of the church complained of what they have received, and ask him to let them know, whether the difficulty cannot be removed without their coming to them as a Council, or whether they have any just objection to make against their coming to them. For the management of these preliminaries, the pastors either have an interview, or else by messengers hold such a communication with one another, as is needful to their concurrence in the action.”

**§ 169. *Proceedings of Ex parte Councils.***

The Council arrive at the place appointed, and being called to order, and having organized by the choice of a moderator and scribe, they open their session with supplications. Their proceedings are commonly, in the first instance, in some public place; and at the commencement of their inquiries, notice is given, of the time and place of their meeting, to the church, of which the aggrieved are members, and to the pastor of the same. If the church and pastor decline paying any attention to the notice given, the Council govern themselves accordingly, and proceed to business. But if they consent to attend, they have liberty to make a statement of the circumstances of the case, and to give the reasons, why they declined joining in a Mutual Council.

Having given the aggrieved party a hearing also, if it should appear, that the circumstances of the case, as now exhibited, do not justify their being called together, nor require their interference, they proceed no further. If, on the contrary, they see reason for examining the subject laid before them, they feel themselves justified, by established principles and practice, to give such examination, and to decide upon the question submitted.

**§ 170. *Further proceedings of Ex parte Councils.***

Generally the evidence, relating to the case, and the arguments are given in public.—“Retiring then, (says Mather, RAT. Disc. Art. IX,) to the place of their more private entertainment, they there consider over again all, that has been laid before them. Every member of the Council may, with leave of the Moderator, declare their sentiments.

The result is drawn up in a proper instrument; where-

in they first report what they find, and then advise what they would have to be done ; usually fortifying their advice with pertinent passages of the sacred Scriptures, annexed unto each of the articles.

If they find, that the person hath not suffered such injury as he pretends unto, he comes off as unhappily as Felicissimus did ; who, after he was excommunicated in his own congregation, made, as an injured person, his appeal to a Synod ; but the Synod ratified and confirmed the sentence of excommunication against him."

**§ 171. *Proceedings of the Ex-parте Council in relation to the church.***

The statement in the ancient RATIO DISCIPLINÆ proceeds as follows.—“ If they find the person to have suffered palpable injury, they endeavour to convince the church of it, and advise them to restore the injured person unto his former station. They order, if the church refuse this, or refuse to give the Council an account of the matter, (a thing, that perhaps never happened,) the person to be admitted into some other church of the neighbourhood, and so unto communion with them all.

The church, persisting in their irregularity, they run the hazard of a proceeding, which was never above once come into, viz. The Council, communicating the true state of the case unto the churches, that sent them, and obtaining from them a ratification of their judgment, they do, by a solemn act, withdraw communion from that church, or from as many in it as will go on to abet, and maintain the unjust censure, which has been passed in it. But, blessed be the glorious Head of the church ! the interposition of his Holy Spirit, working on the minds of his people, while they are in his way thus waiting on Him, still obtains the ends, which they aim at, and prevents such dreadful extremities.”

*§ 172. Object and necessity of Ex-par<sup>e</sup>te Councils.*

The species of councils under consideration undoubtedly wear at first a forbidding appearance ; nor can their true value be rightly estimated without contemplating them in their ultimate, as well as immediate results, and in their connection with, and influence on the whole system. In judging of the value, therefore, of these councils, it ought to be kept in mind, that one great object of Congregationalism is to preserve every individual, whatever his standing, in the full possession of such religious rights, as are recognized in the scriptures. And it was as a security of the fulfilment of this laudable intention, that Ex-par<sup>e</sup>te councils were at first introduced and authorized.

Established USAGE requires the assembling of a Mutual Council in the first instance ; but as the system recognizes no other force than that of persuasion, and as truth and duty do not always avail against the influence of sinister motives, it was foreseen, that Mutual Councils would sometimes be refused by the unjust party. It became a serious question then, in what way the rights of aggrieved persons should be preserved under such circumstances ? And the principle, finally settled upon, was, that they might appeal to the churches at large through the medium of an Ex-par<sup>e</sup>te council.

Such councils, therefore, are a sort of key-stone to the system ; they bind, and consolidate the arch of the fabric, and give it strength. Those unjust and violent procedures, which so often characterize a dominant party, receive in this way a serious check. All persons under discipline have the power of compelling a respect for their rights ; and the churches proceed, both in their treatment of ministers and of the brethren, with the full knowledge, that their doings are liable to be reconsidered and

annulled by a Mutual Council, and in case that be refused, by an Ex-parte one. As the object, therefore, is to maintain every person in his just rights, and as it does not readily appear in what other way it can be secured, the necessity of the power of assembling Ex-parte councils corresponds to the greatness and urgency of the end had in view.

§ 173. *The necessity of them superseded by consociations.*

These views apply to the churches generally. But where there are consociations, or standing Mutual councils of any kind, there does not appear to be equal occasion for Ex-parte councils; provided such permanent councils are obliged to listen to the complaints of individuals. And this is the fact in those churches among us, which have adopted that plan.

"In case any difficulties, (says the seventh of the Saybrook articles,) shall arise in any of the churches of this colony, which cannot be issued without considerable disquiet, that church, in which they arise, or that minister or member aggrieved by them, shall apply themselves to the council of the consociated churches of the circuit, to which the said church belongs, who, if they see cause, shall thereupon convene, hear, and determine such cases of difficulty, &c.\*

---

\*That Ex-parte councils are excluded by consociations, as at present constituted, is fully the opinion of those, among whom the latter system prevails. The subject was brought before the General Association of Connecticut in 1821; and a committee was appointed to report on the question; Has an Ex-parte council authority to organize a church from the members of another gospel church, without the consent of the church, to which such members belong?

The report was made in 1822, accepted, and printed in the proceedings of the Association. It considers the Consociation to be the supreme tribunal, which is so constituted as to consult impartially the rights and duties of all. Every man, who is justly aggrieved, may claim its assistance; but its decisions cannot be questioned and subverted by any other tribunal.

**CHAPTER EIGHTEENTH.****SYNODS.**

§ 174. *Nature of Synods and scripture grounds for the same.*

SYNODS are ecclesiastical assemblies, called together for the purpose of consulting on the general interests of the churches. So that they differ from Councils chiefly in attending to general, instead of particular interests, and in embracing a more ample representation.

Synods, (says the Cambridge Platform, Ch. XVI. § 1,) orderly assembled, and rightly proceeding according to the pattern, Acts 15th, we acknowledge as the ordinance of Christ; and though not absolutely necessary to the being, yet many times, through the iniquity of men and the perverseness of the times, necessary to the well-being of churches, for the establishment of truth and peace therein, Acts xv, 2—15."

§ 175. *Powers and authority of Synods.*

The duties, which properly come within the province of Synods, and the authority, which accompanies their decisions, are thus laid down in the Platform.—“It belongeth unto Synods and Councils to debate and determine controversies of faith and cases of conscience, 1st Chron. xv. 13; 2d Chron. xxix. 6, 7; Acts xv. 24—29; to clear from the Word holy directions for the holy worship of God and good government of the church; to bear witness against mal-administration and corruption in doctrine or manners in any particular church, and to give directions for the reformation thereof; not to exer-

cise church-censures in way of discipline, nor any other act of church authority or jurisdiction, which that presidential Synod did forbear."

"The Synod's directions and determinations, so far as consonant to the word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement therewith, Acts 15th, which is the principal ground thereof, and without which they bind not at all; but also, secondarily, for the power, whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in his Word."

**§ 176. *Of the members of Synods and the calling of the same.***

**SYNODS**, like ecclesiastical assemblies of a less important kind, are composed of ministers and lay delegates after the pattern of the Synod mentioned in the fifteenth chapter of Acts, (see Platform, CH. XVI. § 2.)

Some churches, as already stated, neglected to send lay delegates to the Synod of 1679. The assembly were dissatisfied; a debate ensued, and it was resolved, (says Mather, **MAGNALIA**, Bk. V. Pt. IV. § 3,) "that not only elders, but messengers also were to be delegated by churches, and have their suffrage in a Synod, representing those churches; the primitive pattern of a Synod in the fifteenth chapter of Acts, the primitive practice of the churches in the ages next following the Apostles, and the arguments of such eminent men as Jewell, Whitaker, Parker, and others against those, who mention that laics are no fit matter for such assemblies, being judiciously considered as countenancing this assertion."

In the early periods of the country, Synods repeatedly assembled at the invitation of the civil magistrate. At the present time, such is the entire separation of church

and state, an invitation of that kind would be more likely to be acceded to, than to be given ; and at any rate would come with more propriety and effect from some Conference, Association, or other religious body.

§ 177. *Historical notices of Synods.*

The earliest Synod of the Congregational churches in this country, of which we have any account, was held at Newtown, (afterwards Cambridge,) in the year 1637 ; seventeen years after the first landing at Plymouth. It was called together in consequence of the prevalence of certain doctrines, which were deemed to be of an erroneous and hurtful tendency. Eighty-two erroneous opinions, which had been disseminated in New England, were examined and condemned. The Synod was composed of all the teaching elders in the country, and of messengers from the several churches.

A second Synod was held in the same place in 1643. Several persons had arrived in the country about this time, and attempted to set up the Presbyterian method of church government. This was the occasion of its being called together ; and “the assembly, says Winthrop, concluded against some parts of the presbyterian way”

A third Synod, consisting of ministers and delegates, met at Cambridge in 1646 for the purpose of settling an uniform scheme of church order and government. It protracted its session by adjournments to the year 1648. This Synod framed and adopted the plan of church government, called the Cambridge Platform, a work originally of great merit, and which is referred to, and continues to exert an influence over the churches to this day.\*

\* This Synod met in the autumn of 1646, and having continued in session but fourteen days, adjourned, in consequence of the smallness of the number present and the approach of winter, to meet again on

A fourth Synod, embracing all the minister of Massachusetts, together with lay-delegates, was held at Boston in the year 1662, to deliberate on the subject of Baptism, and the more intimate union or consociation of the churches. There was another assembly of this kind, which met at Boston, Sept. 10th, 1679, commonly called the Reformatory Synod. The deliberations of this body at their first session turned upon these two questions,—I. What are the evils, that have provoked the Lord to bring his judgments on New England ?—II. What is to be done, that these evils may be reformed ?—This Synod held a second session, which commenced May 12th, 1680, during which they considered and adopted a Confession of Faith.

We may infer then, even from these brief notices and independently of what is said in the Platform, that Synods are an authorized part of the Congregational polity ; that they may properly be directed by the churches to inquire concerning all matters of discipline, doctrine, and practice ; and that in many cases their deliberations and advice are highly conducive to the harmony and well-being of the same.” (See Winthrop’s History of New England,

---

the eighth of June in 1647. The principal business during this short session was the discussion and decision of a Proposition concerning the magistrate’s power in matters of religion ; and the appointment of three persons, viz. Cotton of Boston, Richard Mather of Dorchester, and Partridge of Duxbury, each of them to draw up a scriptural model of church government.

The Synod met, agreeably to adjournment, in the ensuing summer, but, as the season proved sickly, they soon adjourned again to meet in September of 1648. Of the models presented, that of Richard Mather was preferred, and was made the basis of the present Cambridge Platform. This fact is particularly stated in the anonymous life of Mather, printed at Cambridge in 1670, which is affirmed by his son, President Increase Mather, to have been written by a person who had ample means of knowing the truth of what he relates. It is also averred in the same work, that he was the sole author of the answer to IX Positions, and of the answer to the XXXII. Questions, both written in 1639, although they pass under the name of the Elders of New England.

Savage's Ed. vol. I, p. 237, II, pp. 136, 264, 269, 308, 330, Tolton's American Annals, 1st Ed. vol. I. pp. 298, 328, 345, 382; Trumbull's History of Connecticut, ch. XIII; Mather's MAGNALIA, Bk. v. &c.)

§ 178. *Synodical decisions persuasive or advisory.*

It is a principle, held by the great body of Congregationalists, that particular churches and individuals retain the right of examining the decisions both of ordinary Councils and of Synods by the light of God's word. If they find them agreeable to the scriptures and satisfactory to their consciences, they are to be received; but if otherwise, they may be rejected. This principle is concisely asserted in the passage before cited from the Platform; and is more fully illustrated and advocated in Samuel Mather's Apology for the Liberties of the New England Churches at chapter seventh. Among other remarks he has the following:

"The Synods of these churches are not like those of other churches; for they have no weapons but what are spiritual. They neither pretend to, nor desire any power, that is *judicial*. If they can but instruct and persuade, they gain their end. But when they have done all, the churches are still free to refuse or accept their advice. As they have no secular power to enforce their canons, they neither ask nor desire its aid. And, since these Synods are such innocent and inoffensive things, none, that have any due information concerning them, can reasonably object against their meeting together, or forbid them without a manifest invasion of the common liberties of mankind. I have said, that these churches, when they meet in Synods, claim to themselves no judicial power. For they are of the celebrated Chalmer's opinion, that the determination of a Council or Synod is

*persuasive, not compulsive ; a ministerial judgment, not bringing along with it any authority and necessity ; and so a decisive suffrage not in itself, but as it is taken out of the scripture,” &c.*

---

## CHAPTER NINETEENTH.

### DISCIPLINE OF WHOLE CHURCHES.

§ 179. *Congregational churches may discipline each other.*

It is a fully established principle, that churches, as well as individuals, are subject to discipline, and that they may exercise acts of discipline on each other. It would be sad indeed, if it were not allowable, to warn sister churches, when they fall into sin ; and to cut them off, when they show a determination to persevere in it. If this power were not possessed, it would be an ominous defect in the system ; destroying, like a worm at the root of a flourishing tree, the principles of circulation and life, and causing weakness and withering.

The power in question results clearly and necessarily from the great law of church communion ; which as naturally develops itself in the dispensation of warnings, admonitions, and reproofs, as in less unpleasant acts of kindness. And that it has been fully recognized as well-founded and necessary, appears from the passage already quoted, at § 142, 143, from Cotton’s Way of the Churches of Christ in New England, and from numerous other testimonies. (See RATIO. DISCIP. Art. IX. § 4 ; Saybrook Articles, VI. &c.)

**§ 180. *Method of discipline laid down in the Platform.***

The Cambridge Platform, (ch. XV,) in enumerating the methods of communion among churches, mentions as the **THIRD**, the dispensing of admonition ; declaring not only the existence of the power, but the particular forms, according to which it is to be exercised.—“ A way, then, of communion of churches is by way of *admonition* ; to wit, in case any public offence be found in a church, which they either discern not, or are slow in proceeding to use the means for the removing and healing of.

Paul had no authority over Peter, yet when he saw Peter not walking with a right foot, he publicly rebuked him before the church, Gal. ii. 11—14. Though churches have no more authority, one over another, than one apostle had over another, so may one church admonish another, and yet without usurpation.

In which case, if the church, that lieth under offence, do not hearken to the church, that doth admonish her, the church is to acquaint other neighboring churches with that offence, which the offending church still lieth under, together with the neglect of their brotherly admonition given unto them. Whereupon those other churches are to join in seconding the admonition formerly given. And, if still the offending church continue in obstinacy and impenitency, they may forbear communion with them, and are to proceed to make use of the help of a synod or council of neighbour churches walking orderly, (if a greater cannot be conveniently had,) for their conviction.

If they hear not the synod, the synod, having declared them to be obstinate, particular churches, accepting and approving of the judgment of the synod, are to declare the sentence of *non-communion* respectively concerning them. And thereupon, out of religious care to keep

their own communion pure, they may justly withdraw themselves from participation with them at the Lord's table, and from such other acts of holy communion, as the communion of churches doth otherwise allow and require."

§ 181. *Treatment of unoffending members in such corrupt church.*

The Platform further proceeds on this subject, in reference to such individuals as may not have been affected by the general corruption of the offending church.— " Nevertheless, if any members of such a church, as live under public offence, do not consent to the offence of the church, but do in due sort bear witness against it, Gen. xviii. 25, they are still to be received to wonted communion, for it is not equal, that the innocent should suffer with the offensive. Yea, furthermore, if such members, after due waiting in the use of all due means for the healing of the offence of their own church, shall at last, with the allowance of the counsel of neighbour churches, withdraw from the fellowship of their own church, and offer themselves to the fellowship of another, we judge it lawful for the other church to receive them, (being otherwise fit,) as if they had been orderly dismissed to them from their own church."

---

## CHAPTER TWENTIETH.

### BAPTISM.

§ 182. *Significancy and the subjects of Baptism.*

BAPTISM is one of the two ordinances of the New Testament, which, as indicative of their highly obligatory and solemn nature, are called SACRAMENTS. It is in

itself a purely external sign ; but it is symbolic, having a moral significancy. Considered in itself, it intimates the fallen and sinful condition of man, and his need of regeneration ; considered in its particular application, it intimates the baptized person's conviction of his personal unholiness by nature, his feelings of penitence and faith, and his hope of regeneration by the Spirit of God.

This general view of its import, however, is to be modified by the subjects, to whom it is applied.

### § 183. *Method of proceeding at Baptisms.*

The account, given in the ancient Ratio Disciplinæ, (Art. IV. § 5,) of the method of proceeding at baptisms, is as follows.—“ At the baptism, the pastor begins with a short prayer, consisting of passages properly introductory to the action before him ; and particularly supplicating for assistance and acceptance in that solemn dedication to God, which the person to be baptized is now passing under.”

[Then follow some remarks on the different forms of expression, which were employed by the ancients, in administering this ceremony ; there having been a great want of uniformity among them.]

“ But in the churches of New England; (the author proceeds,) such a liberty is neither practised, nor approved. In their baptisms, the pastor, pouring water with his hand on the face of the person before him, [i. e. washing or laving the person's face,] confines himself to the words of the institution, viz. (prefacing the christian name of the person, or saying, This person or infant, whose name is ——,) I BAPTIZE ; Or, (especially if it be an adult person,) I BAPTIZE THEE, IN, OR INTO THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY GHOST.

Upon this the pastor annexes another short prayer,

wherein he commands the infants, if they be such, with their parents, or the persons baptized, unto the mercies of God in the New Covenant, now sealed unto them. He prays for the mercies of the Covenant ; particularly that blood of sprinkling, and that effusion of the spirit of grace, and that portion in the resurrection of the just, whereof baptism is to the faithful a token of good ; and such a part in the heavenly city as God has prepared for them, to whom he will be their God.”\*

#### § 184. *Mode of applying water in Baptism.*

The application of water is by sprinkling or laving. Immersion is not generally practised by these churches, although considered lawful. On this subject they reason in this way.

1. The particular mode of baptism cannot be determined from the meaning of the word, **BAPTIZO**, which may mean either to immerse or to lave, according to the particular connection, in which it is found, (see **Mark vii. 4. Heb. ix. 10.**)

2. None of the accounts of baptism, which are given in the New Testament, necessarily imply, that it was performed by immersion. It is true, the Saviour and the eunuch, when they were baptized, went up out of, or rather *from* the water ; but the inference, that they went

---

\* When adult persons, having families, are admitted into a church, it is customary to baptize their children, either at the same time, or soon after. But often it happens, that some of the children themselves are so far grown up, as to be able to understand something of the principles of the Christian religion, and of the nature of a dedication to God. In such cases it is not the Usage to extend baptism to all, unless those, who are old enough to understand the nature of the Christian life, give evidence of possessing it, and desire to be baptized on their own account, and to make a dedication of themselves. To determine, who properly come under this class, and who come within the class of infants, as the term is commonly employed on the subject of baptism, will depend chiefly on the inquiries and the discretion of the minister and the parents.

*under the water, which is sometimes drawn from these expressions, does not appear to be sufficiently warranted. (See the passages in the original.)*

3. The circumstances, attending the baptism of the jailer and his family are of such a nature, as to render the opinion of its being performed by immersion improbable. The baptism was evidently performed at midnight, and within the limits of the prison ; a time and a situation evidently implying some other mode than plunging. Similar views will hold in respect to the baptism of the three thousand at the season of Pentecost.

As, therefore, there are no passages of scripture, which positively require immersion, but various scriptural considerations against it, besides its being always inconvenient and not unfrequently impracticable, these churches have ever thought it fit and requisite, as a general rule, to practise baptism by sprinkling or laving.

#### § 185. *Administration of adult baptism.*

When persons are to be admitted into communion with a particular church, the Confession of faith, adopted by that church, is first read and assented to ; baptism is then administered to such, as have not been previously baptized, followed by the reading of the church covenant, and assent to the same. In such cases of baptism, the person baptized has not only assented to the Confession, but has been previously inquired of as to his motives, feelings, and religious character. (See §§ 25, 50.)

But it not unfrequently happens, that serious and truly pious persons have a desire to be baptized, and still, in consequence of incorrect or imperfect views, or from some other cause, find in themselves an unwillingness to come to the Lord's Supper. In such cases, the minister may baptize ; but it is his duty to inform himself carefully

and satisfactorily of the claims of the applicant to that solemn rite. And as the minister is considered to be the agent of the church in administering it, both Usage, and the reasonableness of the thing itself require, that the assent of the person to be baptized, be had to their Confession of faith, previous to his baptism.

#### § 186. *Relation of adult baptism to church membership.*

Baptism, in the case of adults, does not necessarily constitute the recipient of it a church member; that is to say, a member in a particular church. He may belong, (and the application of baptism is a sign of this,) to the great body of believers; though not to a particular body, united together by a covenant. Although there may be baptism without church membership, it is fully established by usage, that there shall be no admission to particular churches without baptism.

“ Baptism, (says the Answer to the XXXII. Questions, Qs. IV,) hath been administered, and no church or members made thereby; and men have been made members of churches, and not then baptized, but *before*. And, therefore, it is not baptism, that makes members of the church,” &c.

#### § 187. *Of the agent or administrator in Baptism.*

Private persons have at different times assumed to themselves the right of administering baptism. The following remarks may be considered, as expressive of the sentiments of the Congregational churches on that subject. They are the answer of the Cambridge Association, mentioned at §§ 110, 123, to this question, Whether baptism is to be administered by any but the ordained ministers of our Lord Jesus Christ?

I. We find no commission or permission from our Lord, Jesus Christ, for any to be the administrators of baptism, except those, whose work it is by his commission to preach the Gospel, Matt. xxviii. 9. And none have a commission, to make the preaching of the Gospel their work, but such as are, with the call of the faithful, set apart for that work, Rom. x. 15.

BAPTISM is a seal of the covenant ; for any but an officer to apply the seal in the name of the great King of heaven, is a presumptuous arrogance.—BAPTISM is one of the evangelical mysteries, and none but stewards in the house of our Lord Jesus Christ may pretend unto the dispensation of those mysteries.—The apostolical writings intimate, that some are sent to baptize.

II. As both the primitive and Protestant churches have signified their dislike of baptism, administered by common hands ; thus the disorder, and confusion, and the contempt of the institutions of the Lord Jesus Christ, which would thereby be introduced, is a sufficient prejudice against it.

III. The original of the allowance and countenance, given in some churches unto undue administrators of baptism, has been from gross errors in the minds of men about the necessity and operation of that Sacrament, whereof, NON PRIVATIO, SED CONTEMPTUS DAMNAT.

#### § 188. *Of the right of a minister to baptize abroad.*

At an early period there were discussions, touching the extent of the rights and duties of ministers. The subject was one, worthy of serious consideration ; and was the more urgent, as those, who were called to examine it, had experienced the unhappy effects of ecclesiastical usurpations. Among other questions one arose,

Whether a minister might baptize beyond the limits of his own church and people ?

One of the **NINE POSITIONS**, sent by certain pious ministers of England to the American Congregational churches, for the purpose of ascertaining their opinion on the same, was this; That a minister cannot perform any ministerial act in another congregation.—The **ANSWER** of the Elders of New England, returned in 1639, of course involved their opinions on the particular question above-mentioned ; and which was to this effect, that a minister might preach and pray in another congregation, but was not at liberty to administer either Baptism or the Lord's Supper.

This is one of those cases, in which the light of experience has fully overthrown the primitive opinion. Long and established **USAGE** has authorized an opposite sentiment. But then the practice, in order to be consistent with Congregational principles, must be supposed to be with the consent of the church. That is to say ; the church have a right to object to a stranger's administering the Sacraments, if they see cause for it. If they do not object, (which is seldom done and is not to be expected without good cause,) they are supposed to consent.

*'§ 189. Of the administration of baptism in private.*

Strictly private baptism is not practised in these churches ; the usual time and place being the Lord's day, in the midst of the public worshipping assembly. " So, says Mather, we read in the days of Cyprian, **NON, NISI IN ECCLESIA PRAEPOSITIS, LICUIT BAPTIZARE.**" A different practice would expose the ordinance to perversion ; and at least bring it into contempt. And besides, as the administration of it is not a matter of private right,

but flows from the nature of the administrator's office, it ought, on that account, to be publicly performed.

Nevertheless, it is only required, that it should be public, but not necessarily, although commonly in the presence of the whole congregation. And hence it is deemed admissible to administer it any day of the week at Lectures, which are held at some public place, although they are ordinarily attended by a part only of those, who make the religious assembly of the person, who administers it.

Notwithstanding the general rule, baptism is sometimes administered in private houses ; but only when there is urgent and satisfactory reason for it, and when it can be done with suitable solemnity, with religious services, and in the presence of others, particularly members of the church.

### § 190. *Infant baptism.*

The baptism of infants is practised by the Congregational, as is done in most of the Reformed churches. In regard to this subject, as in respect to many others, the plan of this work permits merely a statement of the general grounds of this practice, without going into a minute examination.

1. An argument in favor of infant baptism is drawn, in the first place, from the state of the church as it existed under the former dispensations, compared with the church, as it exists under the Christian dispensation. The general views, involved in this argument, are these : That the church under both the old and new dispensations has ever been the same, although under a different form ; That infants, as well as parents, were admitted into the church under the earlier dispensations ; the rite of circumcision being the sign of their introduction into it ; And that the Christian dispensation, (as the Saviour

came not to destroy, but to fulfil the Law and the Prophets,) did not annul or abridge any of the privileges of the church, that were possessed under the dispensations of former times. But as the right of children, who are bound to their parents by the strongest natural tie, to be solemnly and visibly dedicated to God, and to come within the pale and under the watch of the church, is a blessing and a privilege, we are entitled to ask for the passages in the New Testament, which require its abandonment. We take it for granted, that children are to be publicly dedicated to God, now, as in former times, unless some positive directions can be shown to the contrary. It appearing, therefore, that children may be dedicated to God by their parents in some public and visible way, and there remaining no outward ceremony under the christian dispensation, suitable to that purpose but baptism, we infer, that baptism is designed to take the place of circumcision, and that children may be baptized. And these views are thought to be encouraged by the affectionate saying of Christ; Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God. Mark x. 14.

2. A second argument in favor of infant baptism is derived from the repeated accounts in the Acts of the baptism of whole families. The families referred to are those of Lydia, a seller of purple in the city of Thyatira; of the jailer in the same city; and of Cornelius, the centurion of Caesarea. Instances of this kind are not to be considered as conclusively proving the scripture authority of infant baptism of themselves; but they form a presumptive argument in its favor of great weight.

3. And further, it may be shown from Ecclesiastical history, that the baptism of infants was practised in the time of the primitive christians. This being the fact,

the conclusion seems to follow irresistibly, that they received the practice from the Apostles, and that it was, therefore, known and recognized by the Saviour himself. And if it were known and recognized by Him, or even introduced subsequently and solely by those he commissioned, it must be received, in either case, as the will of Christ, and as a law of the christian dispensation.

*§ 191. Relation of baptized children to the church.*

The relation of baptized children to the church is often spoken of as infant membership. Nor is there any very serious objection to the use of the phrase, provided it be limited by the peculiar situation of those, to whom it is applied; for it cannot be meant to be said, that they are members in full, or members in the ordinary sense of the term. The prevalent views on this subject seem to be briefly these.

As infants have been dedicated to God in the way of his appointment, they may be regarded as members of the universal or general christian church; and perhaps in a sense similar to that, in which all children are members of the civil community, and partakers in the benefits of the same. From the moment of their birth, children are members of the civil community, and entitled to its protection; but new rights, obligations, and responsibilities arise, as they advance in years. The same in regard to baptized infants. As they advance in years, new truths are disclosed; new relations arise; and new duties are devolved upon them; and they are candidates for that particular relation, which results from membership in a particular church.

The situation of baptized infants may be compared, in some respects, to that of baptized adults. Baptism, when applied to *adults*, is a sign, that they are members of the

universal church, and, in consequence of having this sign affixed to them, they are entitled to a participation in the prayers and friendly interest of Christ's followers; and still the mere fact of their baptism, as we have already seen, does not constitute them members of a particular church. And in like manner baptized infants bear the holy seal of membership in the great household of Christ, and have a claim on the prayers, and interest, and faithful exertions of his followers, particularly of *that church*, by which the sacramental seal was affixed; but they cannot be said to belong to, to be members of any particular church, in distinction from the church at large, except perhaps in reference to the near connection formed by natural and local ties. (See § 193, Prop. II.)

Hence when they present themselves for full admission into such particular church, they are justly required to assent to its Articles of belief and to its Covenant, and to give suitable satisfaction in respect to their serious intentions and christian character. It is as much the duty of such church to reject them, if they find them wanting in the suitable qualifications, as it would be to reject an adult, who had been baptized, but was subsequently found to be wanting in piety.\*

#### § 192. *Of the baptism of adopted children.*

Sometimes benevolent Christians adopt orphans, or the children of those who are living, purposing to bring them up as their own, and to treat them in all respects, as is suitable in a Christian parent. According to primitive practice, such adopted children may be admitted to bap-

\*A full view of the arguments, relating to infant baptism, cannot be expected here. Such a view would occupy the whole space, allotted to this brief work. The reader may see it, however, discussed somewhat at length in President Dwight's Theology, SERM. CLVI—IX, and also in the recent Lectures of Dr. Wood's on Infant Baptism.

tism ; one or both of those, who adopt them, being members of churches. It is no matter, whether they be relatives of the children or not ; as the baptism is administered, not on the ground of relationship, but of Christian character and church-membership in those, who adopt.

"There is a large promise, (says Cotton, *Way of the CHURCHES of Christ in New England*, ch. IV. § 6,) to Abraham, stretching the Covenant to his seed, not only to the children of his own body, and to his proselyte servants, but also to all, that were born in his house, or were bought with money, Gen. xvii. 12, 13 ; which happily may graft so much liberty to a Christian sponsor, that if a stranger or wicked man should give him his child from his infancy to be brought up as his own, it may be baptized as his own.

But that is the utmost bounds of liberty in this case. And very doubtful it is, whether the promise pertain only to the children of Proselytes, either strangers or born in the house ; [i. e. there is reason to consider it as extending to the children of heathen, if there were any such in his family.] But we know not any ground at all to allow a faithful man liberty to entitle another man's child to baptism, only upon a pretence of his own promise to have an eye to his education, unless the child be either born in his house, or resigned to him to be brought up as his own."—(See also Chap. VII. § 8 ; and the Answer to XXXII. Questions, Qss. VI. VII.)

#### §. 193. *Duties of particular churches to their baptized children.*

Although as we have had occasion to remark, the seal of baptism, as applied to children, indicates their relationship rather to the general or catholic, than to a particular church, still it has ever been held, that especial duties

in respect to such children devolve upon those churches, to which their parents belong and by whose instrumentality the ordinance has been applied to them. The prevalent opinions on this subject appear to have been sufficiently expressed in the doings of the Cambridge Association already often referred to. In answer to the question, Whether, and how far the discipline of our Lord in our churches is to be extended to the children therein baptized, they offer the following propositions.

I. We judge, that the discipline of our Lord Jesus Christ in our churches ought to be extended unto the children baptized in them; inasmuch as these persons are certainly those, which the scripture calls *within*, and not *without*; and the lambs, as well as others in the flock are to be fed; and the practice of the purest churches has been agreeable to this principle, as well the primitive before, as the Bohemian and others, since the Reformation. Reason also says, that, where a privilege is expected, a discipline is to be acknowledged.

II. Although it is a *membership in the Catholic church*, that gives right unto baptism, yet particular churches, as well as the pastors of those churches, owe a duty to the Catholic church, part of which duty is the application of discipline unto those baptized persons, whom the providence of God shall cast under their inspection.

III. The discipline, which we count owing unto these persons, is an instruction in the laws of our Lord Jesus Christ;—an admonition upon a scandalous violation of those laws;—and upon incorrigibleness in evil, an open rejection from all ecclesiastical privileges. And although persons are most clearly liable to this process, when they have actually renewed their baptismal covenant, and recognized their subjection to the government of our Lord in his church, and the children of the church are to be

accordingly labored withal, that they may be brought hereunto, yet we do not think, that any of the said persons, refusing or neglecting thus to do, are thereby exempted from such a care of the church, to bring them to repentance.

## CHAPTER TWENTY FIRST.

### HALF WAY COVENANT.

#### § 194. *Members and engagements entered into.*

The views to be contained in this work would not perhaps be complete without some notice of what has been termed the Half-Way Covenant. Although it cannot now be considered an authorized part of the Congregational system, the practice of half-way covenanting was followed many years. The plan, briefly stated, was this.

All persons, who had been baptized in infancy, or at some subsequent period, and who sustained a good moral character, were admitted, on requesting it to a COVENANT. And on condition of their assuming such covenant, their infants and young children were admitted to baptism, although neither of the parents had been members of the church in full communion. The covenant, which they assented to, was not in the same terms in all churches, although of similar import.

Among other things, it was recommended to them to covenant, says Trumbull,\* "That they would look well to their households, keep their children and servants in due subjection, instruct them in the principles of religion,

---

\* Records of the Second Church in Hartford, Conn., as quoted by Trumbull's History of Connecticut, vol. I. ch. XIX.

and endeavour to restrain them from all profaneness and immorality; That, as much as in them lay, they would live peaceably with all men, carefully avoiding the unjustly giving or taking of offence; That they would be careful to maintain a chaste conversation, watching against all incentives to uncleanness, especially against keeping vain and disorderly company; That they would mind their own business, and strictly observe the rules of righteousness in commerce and dealings one with another; heedfully watching against all violations of it, by deceit, oppression, and all unjust and dishonest dealings whatsoever; That they would speak the truth one with another, avoiding all lying, slandering, backbiting, reviling and promise-breaking."

It was further recommended that they should covenant, "That they would mutually watch over one another, giving and receiving reproof, as became christians; That they would, in their several capacities, bear due witness against all profaneness and immorality; and that they would not withhold their testimony when it might be necessary for the conviction and punishment of offenders; That they would watch against the prevailing of a worldly and covetous spirit, against intemperance in the use of lawful things; particularly against excess in drinking; and that they would not allow themselves in frequenting either public or private drinking houses," &c.

Persons of a merely moral character, who had either been baptized in infancy or subsequently, were not only admitted to enter into a covenant of this kind, but great exertions were sometimes made to bring them forward, and to induce them to do it. In the church of Hartford, in Connecticut, about the year 1711, one hundred persons appeared, and owned the covenant at one time. (See also for a form of Covenant, different from the above, Mather's RATIO DISCIPLINÆ, ART. IX.

§ 195. *Origin of the practice of half-way covenanting.*

Although a number of very pious and excellent men approved this plan, when it was first proposed, it seems to have had its origin chiefly in worldly and irreligious feelings. To be a church member was in the early times of our country, not only very common, but was attended with a degree of respect and honour ; and even those, whose souls, there is every reason to believe, were unconverted to God by his Holy Spirit, were unwilling to be excluded from the pale of the church. This unwillingness was very naturally increased by an injudicious plan, adopted in Connecticut and Massachusetts, the object of which was to exclude all, who were not church members, from civil offices. The regulation operated very decisively and strongly on the natural passions of the human heart, and many persons were found, who sought admission to the church, as a sort of stepping stone to worldly honours. But this desired admission was not easily realized by such persons, for it was a first principle with the Congregationalists, and one always adhered to by the great body of their churches, that no person can be admitted without giving credible evidence of piety. Excluded from the church for want of piety, and unjustly and unwisely excluded from civil offices in consequence of their exclusion from the church, these persons became restless and unhappy ; and their dissatisfaction was increased by the consideration that their infant children could not be baptized. On this last point we have reason to believe there was a strong and general feeling.

§ 196. *Further remarks on the same subject.*

"The general state of the country, (says Dr. Trumbull, in his narration of certain ecclesiastical events of

the years 1655—6,\* ) was greatly altered from what it was at its first settlement. The people then were generally church members, and eminently pious. They loved strict religion, and followed their ministers into the wilderness for its sake. But with many of their children, and with others, who had since emigrated into this country, it was not so. They had made no open profession of religion, and their children were not baptized. This created uneasiness in them, in their ministers and others. They wished for the honors and privileges of church members for themselves, and baptism for their children ; but they were not persuaded, that they were regenerated and knew not how to comply with the rigid terms of the Congregational churches."

The consequence of this state of things was, that a sort of rush, if one may so speak, was made against the doors of the church ; a strong and general interest was excited ; the church were strenuous, (that is to say, the great body of them,) in defence of their principles ; and those out of its pale were equally strenuous for breaking them down, and gaining admission. Unhappily the result of this state of things was a sort of compromise by means of the plan of a half-way covenant, to be entered into by persons of the character already described. They thus gained a name to live, in the spiritual sense of the word, whatever might be their real characters ; for they could, at least in some sense, be said to be separated from the world, although they were not acknowledged to be fully united in church membership, so that they not only obtained the desired baptism for their children, besides certain objects more purely secular, but so managed as to soothe their own consciences and hide their own increasing danger.

---

\* History of Connecticut, Vol. I. Ch. XIII. ; see also Bogue's and Bennet's History of the Dissenters, Ch. IX. § 4.

§ 197. *Early opposition to the system of half-way covenanting.*

But even this compromising, this *half-way* system, as it was aptly called, although unadvisedly supported by many conscientious and excellent men, as well as by the worldly-minded, was not adopted without much opposition. In consequence of the discussions on this subject, which had taken place in Connecticut, and particularly in consequence of a request from the magistrates of Connecticut, made to some of the ablest ministers of Massachusetts for their opinion, an assembly of ministers was held at Boston, on June 4th, 1657. In this assembly the subject was taken up, and after some examination the principle of the Half-way covenant was found to be approved by a majority of the members. But the plan, although recommended by this weight of authority, continued to be unacceptable to many religious persons, who foresaw in it serious evils. Such was the dissatisfaction, existing both with individuals and churches to some extent, that it became advisable to summon together another assembly, in which the laity should be included. "The practice of church care, (says the author of MAGNALIA, referring to the assembly of 1657,) thus directed and commended was but gradually introduced; *yea, it met with such opposition*, that it could not be encountered with any thing less than a general Synod, of elders and messengers, [ministers and delegates,] from all the churches in Massachusetts colony."

§ 198. *Doings of the Synod of 1662 on this subject.*

Accordingly, the General Court, having the necessity of the matter laid before them at their second session in the year 1661, expressed their desire and order for the

convening of such a Synod at Boston, to be assembled in the spring of the year ensuing."

One of the propositions, adopted at the sessions of this Synod of 1662, was as follows, " Church members, who were admitted in minority, [i. e. who were baptized in infancy or childhood, and whose church membership was thus constituted and in no other way,] understanding the doctrine of faith, and publicly professing their assent thereto, not scandalous in life, and solemnly owning the covenant before the church, wherein they give up themselves and their children to the Lord, and subject themselves to the government of Christ in the church, *their children are to be baptized.*"

The Synod went still further, and by another provision, although it is wrapped up in ambiguous phraseology, they seem to have thrown open the door completely. " Such church members, [that is, those, who are baptized, but still have never been admitted to the Lord's supper,] who either by death, or some other extraordinary providence, have been inevitably hindered from public acting as aforesaid; [that is, from solemnly owning the covenant before mentioned,] yet have given the church cause in judgment of charity, to look at them as so qualified, and such as, had they been called thereunto, would have so acted, *their children are to be baptized.*"

But after all, the Synod found themselves unable to adopt these measures, (or rather approve and enforce what had already been adopted,) without encountering very serious objections on the part of a learned and judicious, though small minority. This minority are stated to have been jealous, lest the sacred ordinance of Baptism should come to be applied unto unfit subjects, and thus diminish that character for purity, which the New England churches had hitherto maintained. Several works

soon made their appearance in print against the doings of the Synod : viz. **ANTISYNODALIA AMERICANA**, by Mr. Charles Chauncey, president of Harvard College ; and a publication, entitled, **Another Essay for the Investigation of Truth**, written by Mr. John Davenport of New Haven, Connecticut. To the last mentioned work was prefixed a distinct treatise, entitled, **An Apologetical Preface**, written by another hand. But while the objectors were decided and able, there was no want of zeal on the other side of the question, although the controversy seems to have been in general conducted with mutual regard and affection. The **ANTISYNODALIA** was answered by Allen, of Dedham ; the **Essay** by Mather of Dorchester, who manifested an interest to the very close of his life in behalf of the system ; while the task of replying to the **Apologetical Preface** fell to Mitchell of Cambridge.

#### § 199. *Views of the objectors to the Synod's Articles.*

The objectors to the doings of the Synod maintained, that there was no warrant in Scripture to apply the seal of baptism to those children, whose parents are in a state of unfitness for the Lord's Supper. Nor did they seem to consider their mere assumption of a Covenant, as giving them a right, which they did not possess before. Except in the case of the children of persons in full communion, for whose baptism they conceded the existence of a scripture warrant, they maintained, that no person could be rightly baptized, without giving credible evidence of being a christian. They considered baptism a high and sacred ordinance, and thought that adults, who were fit for the application of water in baptism, were fit for admission to the Lord's Supper. They maintained also, that the granting of baptism to unregenerate persons and their children, and allowing the name of church membership,

although of a modified and inferior kind, tends to harden them in their sinful and dangerous condition.

§ 200. *Prevalence, results, and abandonment of the system.*

Notwithstanding the arguments, used against it, the practice prevailed. For a time almost every church was burdened with this anomalous appendage of a half-way church of baptized covenanters ; most of whom made no pretensions to any thing more than external decency of moral deportment. And the results, developed by a century of melancholy experience, were such as the objectors to the plan anticipated. The churches, loaded with the superincumbent mass, lost their strength of religious purpose, and spirit of holy enterprise. Although through the goodness of God, they were not at any time wholly deserted, many seasons of declension followed the first bright and glorious days ; but it was not until after years of sin, and depression, and inquiry, that they at last agreed in attributing one great cause of this unhappy state of things to the System under consideration. One church after another abandoned it ; and it may now be regarded, both from general consent and general practice, as no longer a part of their ecclesiastical polity.—(See Trumbull's History of Connecticut, CHAPS. XIII. XIX. ; Bogue's and Bennet's History of Dissenters, CH. IX. § 4; Cotton Mather's MAGNALIA, Bk. V. ; Dr. Increase Mather's Primitive Principles ; the Publications already mentioned, occasioned by the Synod of 1662 ; Dwight's Theology, SERM. CLIX. &c.)

**CHAPTER TWENTY SECOND.****THE LORD'S SUPPER.****§ 201. *Origin and permanency of the Lord's Supper.***

"Our Lord Jesus, (in the language of our Confession of Faith,) in the night, when he was betrayed, instituted the Sacrament of his body and his blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in the churches to the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance and shewing forth of the sacrifice of himself in his death, the sealing of all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in and to all duties, which they owe unto him, and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other."

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is regarded by these churches to be of perpetual obligation, in opposition to the opinion of its temporary nature, which has sometimes been advanced. There is a solemnity and a particularity, attending its institution, which may be supposed to intimate both the seriousness of its nature and its permanency. The disciples of the Saviour were required to partake of bread and wine in remembrance of Him ; and what reason can be given, why the Saviour's memory should be cherished by his immediate disciples, more than by his disciples in later times ? So serious is the import of this ordinance, and its observance so requisite, that the Saviour after his ascension made it a matter of special revelation to the Apostle Paul. "For I have received of the Lord, (he says,) that, which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in

which he was betrayed, took bread. And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, this is my body, which is broken for you ; do this in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come."—These last expressions, which require the observance of the ordinance till the coming of Christ, sufficiently show, that it was not intended to be a temporary institution, but to be continued down from generation to generation.

#### § 202. *Qualifications of those to be admitted.*

By the constitution of the Congregational churches, no persons are admitted to the Lord's Supper, but such as have previously assented to the covenant of a particular church, and have assumed the responsibilities of such covenant. Without doubt, every sincere follower of Christ has a right to participate in the Lord's Supper ; nor can that right be justly overlooked. But, on the other hand, the right of judging of the marks of that sincerity rests with the particular church ; and its members are bound to exercise it with caution and faithfulness. Much evil has been found to result from the admission of persons, who have subsequently given no evidence of renewal of heart and holiness of life, to this solemn and distinctive ordinance. Greater evil has perhaps resulted from a defective application of the principles on this subject, than from a defect in the principles themselves ; it having been ever established in the Usage of the churches, that those to be admitted must be required to give some evidence of a sense of personal sinfulness, of repentance for their sin, of faith in Christ, and also of the nature and obligation of the duties of a particular church state.—(See §§ 11, 25, 26, 35.)

§ 203. *Admission to the eucharist, compared with admission to baptism.*

There is a stricter and more cautious selection of persons, who are to be admitted to the Lord's Supper, than of those, who are to be admitted to Baptism merely.—It is true, baptism is the sign or seal of membership in the general Christian church ; and, therefore, ought not to be applied, but in the way of God's appointment, viz. to adults, who give credible evidence of faith, and to the young children of believers. It is not, therefore, meant to be said, that caution in the administration of baptism may be dispensed with ; but only that increased caution is thought to be requisite in admitting to the Lord's Supper, which implies admission to full membership in a particular church. We find in many cases, that those, who are stated to have believed in the New Testament, were immediately baptized, and their households also were baptized, in like manner ; but those, who partook of the eucharist, were required to examine themselves ; to do it in remembrance of Christ ; to shew forth the Lord's death thereby till he come ; not to eat and drink unworthily, and thus be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, &c. The Scriptures, therefore, lay the foundation of that greater caution in admitting to the Lord's Supper, which has been mentioned.

There is a passage in that father of these churches, Mr. Thomas Hooker, in these words :—“ Baptism is the entrance into Christ's family. There is much more to be looked at, to make a person capable of the Supper of the Lord. A man must be able to examine himself. He must not only have grace, but growth of grace ; so much as to search his own heart ; and he must be able to discern the Lord's body.”

#### § 204. *Mode of administering the Lord's Supper.*

It is the USAGE of these churches, at the administration of the Lord's Supper, to invite the members of all other churches, who are present and are in regular standing, to partake in it. An Address is then made to the communicants, in which some solemn and important topics are introduced, having relation to the atonement, the nature and hopes of the Christian life, &c. ; followed by the consecration of the sacramental elements in prayer. The bread is then broken, and is presented by the deacons to the brethren, who are reminded by the pastor, that they receive it as a symbol or memorial of the body of Christ, which was crucified and broken for sinners. The expressions employed on the presentation of the bread, are stated, in the ancient Ratio Disciplinæ, to be the following, or to this effect : *Our Lord Jesus Christ, having broken the bread, he gave it unto his disciples, saying, This is my body, which is broken for you, take it, and eat of it, and do it in remembrance of me. Wherefore, in the name of that glorious Lord, I now invite you to take and eat hereof, and to do it in remembrance of Him.*

At the distribution of the wine, an address is commonly made as before, although sometimes omitted ; after which the element is consecrated by prayer, agreeably to the original institution ; “ And he took the cup, it is said, and gave thanks.” The cup is then presented to the communicants, who are invited to take and drink of it, remembering that it is a symbol of the blood of Christ, which is shed for the remission of sins.—After this there is an hymn sung ; as it is said in Matthew, *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out unto the mount of Olives.*

**§ 205. Right of a Pastor to administer in other churches.**

At first the same ground was taken in regard to the Lord's Supper, as in respect to baptism, it being supposed, that the pastor had no right, except in particular and special cases, to administer it out of the limits of his own church. (See § 188.) The Platform of 1648 does not expressly and clearly admit such a right, and the prevalent opinion was so much against it, that as late as the publication of the MAGNALIA, which was in 1702, the author of that work asserts he had become acquainted with only one instance of a minister's administering the Lord's Supper abroad.

But further reflection, and a more intimate knowledge of the scriptures have since rightly decided it otherwise. The reasons, justifying and requiring a minister occasionally to aid in the dispensation of the Lord's Supper in other churches, are very obvious ; saying nothing of the utility of the practice. The minister is essentially an agent of the church ; and it is not easy to see, why churches may not show acts of kindness to each other through the agency of their ministers, as well as in any other way. It is, then, truly and properly, only an act of communion, which it is often proper and suitable to exercise, although the church, in whose behalf it is designed to be exercised, may decline it, if they see reason for so doing. And such at last have become the settled views of the churches, and their practice universally corresponds with them. (See Platform, Ch. XX. § 2, and Mather's MAGNALIA, Bk. V. *Historical remarks upon the Discipline, practised in the churches of New England,* §§ 1, 2, 3.

**§ 206. Frequency of administering the Lord's Supper, &c.**

There is no invariable regulation, in respect to the frequency of administering the Lord's Supper ; nor indeed in respect to the particular part of the day, in which it is to be administered.—“ These churches, like the primitive, (says the ancient **RATIO DISCIPLINÆ**,) have no times universally stated for their celebration of the eucharist. Some have it once in four weeks ; some in six ; some in eight ; and some the first Lord's day in every calendar month ; and some the last ; some in the close of the afternoon ; but most in the close of the forenoon. And the pastors likewise reserve to themselves a liberty of altering the times, as they judge fit upon emergencies.

The churches do generally see no necessity of taking the evening for the only time of celebrating the Lord's Supper. For though it be called by the name of **DEIPNON**, it is well known, that in the ancient Greek authors, as ancient as Homer himself, the word is used for a dinner, for a breakfast, for any eating, as well as for a supper. And **COENA**, which is the term, that answers it in Latin, signifies any eating in common. Yea, the English word supper does not necessarily imply night eating ; the last meal in the day is a supper, though it be several hours before night ; and the word, being derived from *sop*, (which is bread, that is dipped in some liquid thing,) the diet, rather than the season of eating is therein intimated. Wherefore the churches do generally count themselves obliged no more to the time of night for the Lord's Supper, than to the place of an upper chamber for it, or the number twelve of the communicants.”

§ 207. *Duty of the church to those, who refuse to attend the Lord's Supper from private prejudices.*

It sometimes happens, that persons are members of particular churches, and attend the Lord's Supper, whose character, in the view of some of the brethren, is exceptionable, although the great body of the church are disposed to entertain a different sentiment. And this has been made, at such times, a reason on the part of the brethren, entertaining such unfavorable sentiments, for neglecting to come to that solemn ordinance. They have even deemed it their duty not to do so ; and thus jealousies have been increased ; difficulties have augmented ; and the cause of Christ has been injured. The subject, therefore, being one of much practical importance, and not being fully, although partially settled in the Cambridge Platform, happily came under the examination of the Cambridge Association. (See § 111.) In answer to the question, *What is the duty of the church to persons, who upon private prejudices withdraw from the communion of it,* the following propositions were agreed upon.

(1.) Persons, that have taken up any private prejudices against any in the communion of the church, whereto they do belong, are directed by the commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ, and are engaged by the covenant of watchfulness, to endeavor the repentance of the persons under supposed offence by a personal application.

(2.) They, that upon offences taken, do neglect this way of proceeding, are guilty of sin against the Lord's commandment, and their own covenant ; and by their withdrawing from the table of the Lord, their sin is aggravated.

(3.) The withdrawing of persons thus irregularly from the communion of the church at the Lord's Table, does carry an hard and high imputation upon the church itself, which adds more of a fault unto so sinful a schism.

(4.) If the person, that hath been offended, hath done his duty, and either the pastor do refuse to lay the matter before the church, for the insignificancy of it, or the church upon hearing of it, do pronounce itself satisfied, the person is obliged still to continue his communion with the church, until a Council of churches declare the contrary.

(5.) Such a sinful separation from the communion of the church, being a moral evil, the scandal is to be by the discipline of the church proceeded against, as other censurable scandals. The pastor, upon observation and information of the sin, is to send for the person withdrawing, and instruct, and convince, and admonish him ; and upon contumacious obstinacy, the church is to deal with him, as one unruly, and walking disorderly.

(6.) Nevertheless, compassion towards the ignorant, or injured, is very much to determine the more or less, vigour, wherewith such offences are to be prosecuted.

§ 208. *This sacrament administered to members of other sects.*

The privilege of attending upon this Sacrament is not limited to Congregationalists, but is imparted to all, who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, to whatever religious sect they belong. It is only required, that they be members of a particular church, and in regular church standing. And this being the case, they are not only permitted, but are invited, and expected to come to this sacred memorial of the Saviour's love. It is an occasion on which Christian feeling, and not party feeling should predominate. It is a feast of charity, in which the distinctions of sect should be obliterated and lost, and emotions of pride, uncharitableness, and jealousy disappear in the gush and overflowings of penitence and gratitude.

**CHAPTER TWENTY THIRD.****CHURCH CONFERENCES.**

§. 209. *Of Conferences as compared with other religious and ecclesiastical bodies.*

One of the most pleasing and happy features in Congregationalism, although it has been but recently realized, is the system of Church Conferences. It will be the object of this chapter to give a brief account of them.

Conferences are permanent bodies, united under a Constitution, and formed solely for religious purposes. Although they agree with Councils in being composed of lay delegates as well as of ministers, they differ in this important respect, that they exercise no acts of authority or discipline. They expressly disclaim all interference in the rights of particular churches. In this particular, they agree with Associations, although they differ very essentially from associated bodies in admitting lay members. They agree somewhat nearly with the Circular Prayer Meetings, which have prevailed in some neighborhoods of churches in respect to their objects, and the members, of which they are composed; but differ in having a Constitution, by which their proceedings are regulated in a methodical manner, and which gives to them a fixed and permanent character.

Although united prayer is one great object of Church Conferences, it is not all; they seek to cultivate christian intercourse and acquaintance; to communicate instruction on subjects of a religious nature; to devise liberal efforts in behalf of destitute sister churches; and to

quicken each other by reproofs, and warnings, and scriptural encouragements, to greater diligence and higher sanctity. But these objects require to be more distinctly stated.

### §. 210. *Objects of Church-Conference.*

(1.) Among other objects, to be secured by the system of Conferences, is the offering of *united prayer*.—Prayer in solitude ascends with efficacy to the throne of God, but multitudes of hearts, united for a common object, and impelled by a common feeling, have greater strength to gain admittance. “I will give thee thanks,” says the Psalmist, in the great Congregation; I will praise thee among much people.”

Indeed there are many subjects of prayer, which are of a public nature, and in behalf of which it would be in vain to expect a blessing without a common or public effort. In the economy of divine Providence, means are proportioned to ends; and unless all objects are of a private nature, it will follow, that there are occasions of public and united supplication; for if the end concern all, then the lifting up of a solitary voice, of an isolated and disjointed cry, is not adequate to it. What a blessing, then, are Church Conferences, where prayer is emphatically the voice of the great Congregation, is common and united, and is made to bear on the great, and united, and general interests of religion!

(2.) A second important object is the extension of Christian intercourse and acquaintance.—The opportunities of intercourse among the churches are not frequent, independently of those which are afforded by the Conferences. Their members seldom meet together; they remain ignorant of each other; and are wanting in a suitable Christian interest. This is a great error, and is

attended with unhappy consequences. In no way can this evil be remedied, and Christian intercourse and acquaintance be promoted more effectually, than by the stated system of Conference. At these great assemblies, friendships are formed among those, who were before strangers; the distrust, the results from ignorance of each other, is done away; a foundation is laid for mutual confidence and cooperation. And confidence, and cooperation, and increased acquaintance cannot well exist, without an increase of mutual love.

(3.) Another great object is **MUTUAL INSTRUCTION**.—The knowledge of each generation dies of necessity with its possessors, unless it be communicated to those who succeed them; of course, speculative and practical subjects of a religious nature are to be brought under repeated discussion. It is made an object, therefore, of Conferences, to unfold and inculcate religious truth.

This object is in some measure attained in Associations of ministers, but its benefits are, in great part, limited to their own members; especially as many topics, coming under the examination of such Associations, are not so directly fitted to interest and benefit the lay-members of churches, as topics of a different kind, besides their not being present at the discussion of them. But at Conferences, laymen, as well as ministers, attend; and there is much instruction communicated, which is profitable and important to all alike; not only in the forms of sermons and addresses, but of reports and dissertations.

(4.) A fourth object, which is promoted by the system of Conferences, is the rendering of aid to feeble churches. In vain are Christians assembled together, unless they have a heart to do good. Without benevolent feelings, their prayers are like the tinkling cymbal. But such is the nature of Conferences, that their benevolence

is not only strongly called into exercise, but it naturally, and eminently exerts itself in behalf of feeble churches. An opportunity is afforded to each to communicate its wants and weakness; and all the circumstances of the meeting are of such a nature, as to excite an interest to relieve them.

(5.) They are also designed and expected to give strength and vigor to individual Christians in the religious life.—Our Creator has so formed us, that our minds operate on each other by sympathy. When we notice feelings of penitence, excited in the hearts of others around us, we may expect, from the constitution of our minds, to experience similar feelings kindled up in ourselves, while the well established courage of others confirms and strengthens our own weaker faith. And hence as the Spirit of God does not subvert the laws of the mind, but operates in connexion with them, many come away from these great assemblies, saying, It was good to be there. They found in themselves common trials, and they are strengthened in the exercise of a common hope. “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.”

#### § 211. *Early views of Congregationalists on Conferences.*

It was the earnest desire of the fathers of these churches, which was fully evinced by their prayers, their writings, and their good deeds, that the churches might agree and act together as an harmonious body, as a friendly and faithful brotherhood. Such desires were expressed by the Synod of 1662; and various acts, suitable to be put forth in the doings of Councils and Conferences, are expressly named. (See § 144.)

Even before that time, the subject of the communion

of churches, exercised in some stated and permanent way, had arrested the attention of the churches at large, and particularly of some highly esteemed individuals. On this point the worthy name of Cotton, so often repeated in our ecclesiastical annals, stood forth conspicuous, as on every other, that concerned the welfare of religion. It is worthy of notice, that his devout and prescient mind proposed, at least, an hundred and seventy years ago, the same stated plan of church communion, and even adopted the same name, as have been proposed and gratefully adopted within these few years.

The plan, which is to be found in Dr. Increase Mather's First Principles of New England, and is there said to have been drawn up by its author not long before his death, which took place in 1652, was as follows :

§ 212. *Cotton's plan or proposition for Conferences.*

" As it is the practice of godly christians in the churches, without any scruple, and with much edification and increase of love to meet together in convenient numbers of families at set times, house-by house, to exercise that Christian communion, which the moral rules of the Gospel call for, 1 Thess. v. 11, Coll. iii. 16, Heb. xi. 13 ; so also upon the same grounds besides others, it would, by the blessing of God, conduce much to the increase of brotherly love and unity, the spiritual edification of many by mutual faith of each other, to the strengthening of the hearts and hands of one another in the work of the Lord, if the *elders* and *brethren* of the churches did meet together, church by church, in convenient numbers at set times, (*not to exercise any jurisdiction over any,*) but to enjoy and practice church communion by prayer together, hearing the word preached, and CONFERENCE about such cases and questions of conscience, as shall be found useful or needful for the edification and comfort and peace

of every church, or any of the brethren thereof. And this course might tend much to satisfy the spirits of diverse godly brethren, who have thought, that we mind so much the distinction of particular churches, and the duties of fellow members in the same, that we lose much of the comfort of love and the fellowship of the spirit, which we might enjoy, and that we fall short in some brotherly love, which we owe mutually to our dear brethren of the several churches.

*For the better improvement of such a Conference.*

(1.) It is fit that the number of churches so to meet, be regulated according to the nearness or distance of churches, and as other conveniences or inconveniences shall require.

(2.) For the times of meeting, it may seem best to leave it to the wisdom of each society of churches, to meet more frequently or seldom as they shall see cause.

(3.) Concerning their exercises, it is meet, that the elders, [MINISTERS, there being anciently two to each church,] where the Conference is to be held, should choose with the consent of the church some other elder as they see best, whom they may intreat to preach at their meeting, and also desire some to moderate in the Conference, and agree upon such questions as they see fit, three or four, and send them to the elders of other churches, at least fourteen days before the time of their assembling.

(4.) For the ordering of the time, it may be fit that the sermon should end at eleven o'clock, and after it the Conference follow, and continue so long as shall be found meet and seasonable.

Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, who is the counsellor, the everlasting father, and prince of peace, grant unto all his churches truth and peace always, and by all

means ; and He counsel and guide the hearts of his people to discern and embrace all such ways, as himself hath sanctified to those holy ends."

§ 213. *Recent attempts to establish Conferences.*

This plan was not adopted ; although from the beginning there have been instances of churches in the same neighbourhood meeting together from time to time, at which lay-members, as well as pastors, have been commissioned by the churches to be present, and spending the season in acts of friendly communion and prayer. But the establishment of a permanent union for this end, although it was long ago proposed, an organized system of meetings for prayer and praise, for mutual religious instruction and acts of benevolence, regulated by a constitution, and according to a simple and consistent method, is of recent date.

Efficient measures for this object appear to have been first taken in the county of York in Maine. The first annual meeting of the York Conference of Churches took place on the first Tuesday of October in 1823. The results were so pleasant, the propositions and desires of the fathers of these churches were so easily and happily realized, that the system was at once adopted in other counties, and from the State of Maine has spread into the neighboring States.

The time was a favorable one ; the way was prepared in the Providence of God ; the churches felt the necessity of greater union ; and they received the system of Conferences, as the ornament, completion, and stability of their church government and order. So that the seed sown nearly two centuries before, at last took root, and sprung up with a strength and beauty and richness, proportioned to its long concealment in the earth.

**§ 214. Permanent rules or constitutions of Conferences.**

The different Conferences do not all precisely agree in their particular regulations, although they all have the same general object, and are governed by the same general principles. Each Conference assumes a distinctive name, generally that of the County; and all the particular churches within that County may become members of it, if they see fit. The constitution, by which the Conference is governed, states the number of lay delegates, who shall be members of it, the number and duties of its officers, the time of the annual meeting, the prominent religious exercises, and whatever else is deemed necessary for its organization, usefulness, and permanency.

In particular, there is generally found in the Constitution of each Conference an article to this effect; That it shall neither assume, nor exercise any control in matters of faith, or discipline of the church; although it may give advice, when requested.

**§ 215. Method of organizing Conferences.**

The practice, followed in the organization of Conferences, exhibits a due regard to Congregational principles. Any number of churches in the same vicinity may meet together by their delegates, and frame a CONSTITUTION. This constitution is submitted to all the Congregational churches within the limits, which are proposed to be embraced in the Conference. They have, therefore, a fair opportunity to examine it, and to form a deliberate opinion as to its object and tendency. If the churches, to which the constitution is proposed, or a certain number of them, vote to accept it, they then appoint ministers and lay delegates, to meet according to the terms of the constitution, and it thenceforward goes into effect. The articles of the constitution are generally so framed, as to

allow any church to leave the Conference, on its signifying its desire so to do.

### § 216. *Meetings and religious exercises.*

The whole session of a Conference generally continues two days; although different conferences may sometimes be found to differ in this respect, as in some others. During this time there are repeated meetings; one of which, commencing the first day early in the forenoon, is termed a meeting for business. The Conference at this time appoint the necessary officers; select committees of arrangements and overtures, to advise and superintend in regulating the business and religious exercises of the session; attend to reports concerning the amount and application of their funds; appoint committees to visit the churches, and do whatever else is necessary of a business nature. The meeting is public; although perhaps less interesting to the audience, than those which are to follow.

The meetings, which are held subsequently in the course of the day, are of a more strictly religious character. Reports are given in, both by the members from the churches themselves and former visiting committees, concerning the state and prospects of the churches within the limits of the Conference; dissertations are read on important subjects of a religious nature; and propositions are made, and discussions are held concerning the duties of Christians and the progress of Zion, intermingled with prayers, and praises, and the preaching of the word of God.

The services of the second day usually commence with a prayer-meeting held early in the morning; at which addresses are made. The Conference meets again in the course of the forenoon; various religious exercises,

under the direction of the committee of overtures; are continued; and, among other things of great religious interest, reports are made by delegates from other Conferences, which show the state of the churches throughout the country. These holy and devout exercises are closed in the after part of the day by a sermon, and the administration of the Lord's Supper; at which time there is not unfrequently a renewal of covenant. Frequently other religious bodies, such as Missionary, Bible, or Education Societies, meet at the same time with Conferences; and give new interest and importance to these deeply solemn and affecting occasions.

---

#### CHAPTER TWENTY-FOURTH.

#### WORSHIP AND RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS.

##### § 217. *No time sacred but the Sabbath.*

Congregationalists regard no day as holy, (that is to say, divinely set apart to rest and to religious exercises,) but the Sabbath, that seventh part of time, which is set apart in the Scriptures. This portion of time was originally the seventh or last day of the week, but since the resurrection of Christ, it has been changed into the first day of the week, called in Scripture the *Lord's day*.

Other days may be set apart for religious purposes, but the observance of them is not binding on the conscience, except it be for considerations, which are independent of the particular time. This is expressly asserted in the Articles of the Leyden church, which may be considered in some respects the root or fountain of Congregational principles. "The Sabbath, (say these Articles,) is the only day, which is set apart, as holy and

to be kept sacred in the Scriptures; but churches and congregations are at liberty to set apart days of fasting, thanksgiving, and prayer." (See § 17.)

#### § 218. *Form and ceremonies of worship.*

The Sabbath, then, is the select and great day of public worship. The churches meet together for the adoration of the Most High, but the religious services, in which they engage, are unostentatious and simple. They hold it to be much more important to move the heart, than merely to please the imagination, and gratify curiosity.—The morning worship on the Sabbath, commonly commences with a short prayer, in which the blessing of God is invoked, in particular, on the solemn acts of worship, which are to be performed. Then follow the reading of the Scriptures, singing, renewed supplications, and the preaching of the Word. The Sermon is followed by another prayer, and in the afternoon by prayer and singing. The services are closed by a benediction of the pastor, supplicating, in behalf of his audience, *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.*

#### § 219. *Places of worship and dedications of the same.*

No one place, in itself considered, is more sacred than another. God requires the homage of the heart. Such homage is the only suitable and appropriate worship; and when it is given, it matters not, whether it be on mount Gerezim, or at Jerusalem, or at any other place.

Houses of worship, are, nevertheless, erected, and are dedicated to that object, with solemn services. The command of God, which requires his people not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, can hardly be fulfilled without them. Nor is the practice of erecting houses of worship more agreeable to the Scriptures, than

to the nature of the human mind, since we soon attach, by the power of association, a sort of sacredness to objects, which possess no such character of themselves.

And hence we every where meet with houses of worship, which are dedicated to God as peculiarly and appropriately his ; and thus were dedicated the Tabernacle and the Temple of the Old Testament. The ministers of the neighboring churches assemble together ; their prayers and praises, their reading of the Scriptures, and their solemn instructions, all have reference to the interesting occasion, on which they are met. They bring their offering of gratitude before the Lord ; and they say, as did Solomon of old, *Now, therefore, arise, O Lord God, into thy resting place, thou, and the ark of thy strength.*

#### § 220. *Custom in respect to ministerial exchanges.*

The pastors of the churches often perform for each other the religious exercises of the Sabbath. This is one of the acts of communion, exercised by the churches.

In respect to the particular occasions, on which exchanges are to be made, the pastors are, in ordinary cases, left to exercise their discretion. It is neither the sentiment, nor the Usage of the churches to restrict them on this point ; although the right is one, which frequently requires to be exercised with prudence. The wishes of his people ought not to be treated by the pastor with wanton disregard, although they should not control his better judgment.

#### § 221. *Of days of fasting and thanksgiving.*

It is the custom of these churches to set apart days of prayer and fasting, and of thanksgiving. The language of the CONFESSION of Faith, (ch. xxii,) is, " Solemn humiliations, with fastings and thanksgiving upon special

occasions, are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner."

Such seasons are repeatedly, and even frequently mentioned in our ecclesiastical annals. In setting them apart and in observing them, our forefathers showed their regard for the examples set before them in the Scriptures, and their deep sense of their own needs. There is no stated time for these occasions; each church, or each body of churches, may fix upon a day, to be spent in this solemn manner, for themselves. And experience sufficiently warrants the remark, that such days, when properly and seriously observed, have proved highly propitious to the religious progress of the churches.

### § : 22. *Of private religious meetings.*

Private meetings of Christians are kept up as in former times; nor can it be otherwise, as long as the true Congregational spirit remains. Blessed are they, who speak often to one another on the things of Christ.— "It is usual among us, (says Mather, RAT. DISC. ART. x.) for Christians to uphold private meetings, wherein they do, with various exercises, edify one another; and it is not easy to reckon up the varieties used in them. It is observed, that the power of godliness ordinarily prevails in a place, as the private meetings are duly kept up and carried on.

Sometimes a dozen families, more or less, agree to meet in course at one another's houses, on a day, and at an hour agreed on once a fortnight or once a month, as they shall please. And the families, unto whose turn it falls out to entertain the rest, sometimes takes that opportunity, to invite others of their neighbors unto the religious entertainments of their houses.

They sometimes have the company of a minister, who spends an hour or two in a prayer and a sermon with them. And the candidates of the ministry sometimes do

at these meetings perform some of their first probationary exercises.

Otherwise, one of the brethren makes a prayer ; and one reads a sermon, either printed in a book, or taken by the pen of a ready writer in the public assemblies ; and they close the exercise with singing of psalms," &c.

§ 223. *Of the custom of renewing Covenant.*

A practice has prevailed in these churches of RENEWING COVENANT ; not frequently, because that might diminish the results of an undertaking so solemn, but in times of great sin and declension, and also on such occasions, (whatever they may be,) which bring together a considerable number of professors of religion. The practice is authorised, and is supported on scripture grounds by the Synod of 1679. In answer to the question, What is to be done to reform the prevailing evils ? they say,

" Solemn and explicit renewal of Covenant is a scripture expedient for reformation. We seldom read of any solemn reformation, but it was accomplished in this way, as the scripture doth abundantly declare and testify. And as the judgments, which beset the Lord's people of old, are recorded for our admonition, (1st Cor. x. 11,) so the course, which they did (according to God) observe, in order to reformation, and averting those judgments, is recorded for our imitation, and this was an *explicit renovation of covenant*. And that the Lord doth call us to this work, these considerations seem to evince.

I. If implicit renewal of covenant be an expedient for reformation, and to divert impending wrath and judgment, then much more an explicit renewal is so ; but the first of these is indubitable. In prayer, and more especially, on days of solemn humiliation before the Lord, there is an implicit renewal of covenant, and yet the very dictates of natural conscience put men upon such duties, when they are apprehensive of a day of wrath approaching. If we

may not renew our covenants with God, for fear lest men should not be true and faithful in doing what they promise, then we must not observe days of fasting and prayer; which none will say.

II. When the church was over-run with idolatry and superstition, those, whom the Lord raised up as reformers, put them upon solemn *renewal of covenant*. So Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah. By a parity of reason, when churches are overgrown with worldliness, (which is spiritual idolatry,) and other corruptions, the same course may, and should be used in order to reformation.

III. We find in Scripture, that when corruption in manners, (though not in worship,) hath prevailed in the church, renovation of covenant hath been the expedient, whereby reformation hath been attempted, and in some measure attained—The Jews have dreaded the sin of idolatry, ever since the Babylonian captivity, John viii. 41. But in Ezra's and Nehemiah's time, too much sensuality, sabbath-breaking, oppression, and strait-handedness respecting the public worship of God, (the very sins which are found with us,) were common prevailing iniquities. Therefore did those reformers put them upon renewing their covenant, and solemnly to promise God, that they would endeavor not to offend by those evils as formerly, Ezra x. 3. Neh. v. 12<sup>o</sup>, &c.—(See MAGNALIA, Bk. v. P. i. 4.)

#### § 224. *Form of a renewal of Covenant.*

Agreeably to the advice of the Synod of 1679, the churches generally renewed their covenant, and, with a slight variation, in the same form of words. It is given at length in the MAGNALIA, and the following form is abridged and altered from it.

WE, who are now mercifully assembled in the presence of God, humbly confess our sins, and especially our manifold breaches of the Covenant, which we have taken

in former times, and being deeply penitent for the same, we here COVENANT ANEW, to give ourselves up to that God, whose name alone is Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the one only true and living God, and to our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man, our prophet, priest, and king.

We hereby COVENANT ANEW, depending not on ourselves, but on the grace of God and his Holy Spirit, to cleave unto God as our chief good, and to the Lord Jesus-Christ, by faith and gospel obedience, as becometh his covenant people forever.

We renew our solemn engagement to live as the professed followers of Christ, to watch with brotherly love for the spiritual interests of each other, and to submit ourselves to the discipline and government of Christ in his church; humbly suppling, that God will be pleased to forgive the neglect and sins, of which we have been guilty in times past.

We make a solemn promise, that we will endeavour, with the help of Christ, to reform our hearts and our conduct, to mortify our sins, to walk more closely with God than ever yet we have done, and to continue in the sincere worship of God both public and private. And we desire publicly and deeply to lament the prevailing sins of these times; the unbelief and ingratitude, which exist; the neglect of prayer, the contempt of God's word, the profanation of his name, the disregard of his Sabbath, and whatever other sins cause his displeasure against us.

We desire to be deeply sensible, that it is an exceedingly solemn thing to covenant with the infinitely glorious majesty of heaven and earth. And that we may be enabled to observe and keep this sacred RENEWAL of our Covenant, we desire to deny ourselves, and to depend wholly on the mercy of God, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the merits and love of our blessed Saviour.

**CONSTITUTION  
OF THE  
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.**

**Part Second.**

**CONFession OF FAITH,**

ORIGINALLY ADOPTED BY THE  
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES IN ENGLAND,  
ASSEMBLED AT THE SAVOY IN LONDON, IN 1658, AND AFTERWARDS  
WITH SOME SLIGHT VARIATIONS, APPROVED AND  
ADOPTED BY THE  
AMERICAN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES,  
IN THE SYNOD OF  
MINISTERS AND DELEGATES,  
ASSEMBLED AT BOSTON, IN 1680.

---

**PORTLAND :**  
PUBLISHED BY SHIRLEY AND HYDE.  
1829.



## PREFACE.

THE Lord Jesus Christ witnessed a good confession, at the time when he said, To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth ; and he taketh notice of it, to the praise and high commendation of the church in *Pergamus*, that they held fast his name, and had not denied his faith. Nor are they worthy the name of Christians, who, though the Lord by his Providence call them publicly to own the truth they have professed, shall nevertheless refuse to declare what they believe, as to those great and fundamental principles in the doctrine of Christ, the knowledge whereof is necessary unto salvation. We find how ready the apostle was to make a confession of his Faith ; though for that hope's sake he was accused and put in chains. And the martyr's of Jesus, who have laid down their lives in bearing witness to the truth, against the infidelity, idolatry, heresy, apostacy of the world, when Pagan, Arian, or overspread with Popish darkness : Having their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, were free and forward in their testimony, confessing the truth, yea, sealing it with their blood. With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Rom. x. 10. Nor is there a greater evidence of being in a state of salvation, than such a confession, if made in times or places where men are exposed to utmost suffering upon that account. 1 John iv. 15. And if Confession of faith be, in some cases of such importance and necessity, as hath been expressed ; it must needs be in itself, a work pleasing in the sight of God, for his servants to declare unto the world, what those principles of truth are, which they have received, and are, by the help of Christ, purposed to live and die in the stedfast profession of. Some of the Lord's worthies have been of renown among his people in this respect ; especially *Iraenius* and *Athanasius* of old, and of latter times *Beza*, all whose (not to mention others,) Confessions, with the advantage which the church of God hath received thereby, are famously known.

And it must needs tend much to the honor of the dear and blessed name of the Lord Jesus, in case many churches do join together in their testimony. How signally the Lord hath owned the Confession

of the four general Synods or Councils for the suppression of the heresies of those times, needs not to be said, since no man can be ignorant thereof, that hath made it his concern to be acquainted with things of this nature. The Confession of the *Bohemians*, of the *Waldenses*, and of the reformed Protestant churches abroad, (which also, to shew what harmony in respect of doctrine there is among all sincere professors of the truth, have been published in one volume,) all these have been of singular use, not only to those that lived in the ages when these declarations were emitted, but unto posterity, yea, unto this day.

There have been some who have reflected upon these New-English churches for our defect in this matter, as if our principles were unknown; whereas it is well known, that as to matters of doctrine we agree with other reformed churches. Nor was it that, but what concerns worship and discipline, that caused our fathers to come into this wilderness, while it was a land not sown, that so they might have liberty to practise accordingly. And it is a ground of holy rejoicing before the Lord, that now there is no advantage left for those that may be disaffected towards us, to object any thing of that nature against us. For it hath pleased the only wise God so to dispose in his Providence, as that the elders and messengers of the churches in the colony of *Massachusetts*, in *New England*, did, by the call and encouragement of the honored General Court, meet together Sept. 10, 1679.

This synod at their 2d session, which was May 12, 1680, consulted and considered of a Confession of Faith. That which was consented unto by the elders and messengers of the congregational churches in *England*, who met at the *Savoy* (being for the most part, some small variations excepted, the same with that which was agreed upon first by the Assembly at *Westminster*, and was approved of by the Synod at *Cambridge* in *New England*, Anno 1648, as also by a General Assembly in *Scotland*), was twice publicly read, examined and approved of: that little variation which we have made from the one, in compliance with the other may be seen by those who please to compare them. But we have (for the main) chosen to express ourselves in the words of those Reverend Assemblies, that so we might not only with one heart, but with one mouth glorify God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

As to what concerns church-government, we refer to the Platform of Discipline agreed upon by the elders and messengers of those churches, Anno 1648, and solemnly owned and confirmed by the late Synod.

What hours of temptation may overtake these churches, is not for us to say. Only the Lord doth many times so order things, that when his people have made a good Confession, they shall be put upon the trial one way or other, to see whether they have (or who among them hath not) been sincere in what they have done.

The Lord grant that the loins of our minds may be so girt about with truth, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.



# **CONFESSiON OF FAITH.**

---

## **CHAPTER FIRST.**

### **OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURE.**

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable ; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times, and in diverse manners to reveal himself, and to declare his will unto his church ; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly to writing : which maketh the holy Scripture to be most necessary ; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

2. Under the name of holy Scripture, or the word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testament, which are these :

#### *Of the Old Testament.*

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of

Songs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah, Malachi.

*Of the New Testament.*

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's epistle to the Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 to Timothy, 2 to Timothy, to Titus, to Philemon, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistle of James, the first and second Epistles of Peter, the first, second and third Epistles of John, the Epistle of Jude, the Revelation.

All which are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life.

3. The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved or made use of, than other human writings.

4. The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God.

5. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church, to an high and reverend esteem of the holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, (which is, to give all glory to God,) the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be

the word of God. Yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the holy Spirit, bearing witness by, and with the word in our hearts.

6. The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.

7. All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all. Yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

8. The Old Testament in *Hebrew*, (which was the native language of the people of God of old,) and the New Testament in *Greek*, (which at the time of writing of it was most generally known to the nations,) being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them. But because these original

tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto and interest in the Scripture, and are commanded in the fear of God to read and search them; therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that the word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner, and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope.

9. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture, (which is not manifold, but one,) it must be searched and known by other places, that speak more clearly.

10. The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decretēs of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other, but the holy Scriptures delivered by the Spirit; into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved.

---

## CHAPTER SECOND.

### OF GOD, AND OF THE HOLY TRINITY.

There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure Spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious,

merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and withal, most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

2. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in, and of himself; and is alone in, and unto himself, all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest, his knowledge is infinite, infallible and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience, as creatures, they owe unto the creator, and whatever he is further pleased to require of them.

3. In the unity of the God-head there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son. Which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence upon him.

**CHAPTER THIRD.****OF GOD'S ETERNAL DECREE.**

God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

2. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed any thing, because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.

3. By the decree of God for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death.

4. These angels and men thus predestinated, and fore-ordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

5. Those of mankind who are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions or causes moving him thereunto, and all to the praise of his glorious grace.

6. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he by the eternal and most free purpose of his will fore-

ordained all the means thereunto: wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, or effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified and saved, but the elect only.

7. The rest of mankind God hath pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.

8. The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination, is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending the will of God revealed in his word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.

---

## CHAPTER FOURTH.

### OF CREATION.

It pleased God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom and goodness, in the beginning to create or make of nothing the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.

2. After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, after his own image, having the law of God written in their heart, and power to fulfil it ; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change. Besides this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil ; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.

---

## CHAPTER FIFTH.

### OF PROVIDENCE.

God the great creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose and govern all creatures, actions and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible fore-knowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy.

2. Although in relation to the fore-knowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly ; yet by the same providence he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

3. God in his ordinary providence maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them at his pleasure.

4. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and the infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in his providence, in that his determinate counsel extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men, (and that not by a bare permission,) which also he most wisely and powerfully boundeth, and otherwise ordereth and governeth in a manifold dispensation, to his own most holy ends, yet so as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who being most holy and righteous neither is, nor can be the author or approver of sin.

5. The most wise, righteous and gracious God doth oftentimes leave for a season, his own children to manifold temptations and the corruptions of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption, and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled, and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.

6. As for those wicked and ungodly men, whom God as a righteous judge for former sins, doth blind and harden, from them he not only withholdeth his grace, whereby they might have been enlightened in their understandings, and wrought upon in their hearts; but sometimes also withdraweth the gifts which they had, and exposeth them to such objects, as their corruption makes occasions of sin; and withal gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of satan, whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, even under those means which God useth for the softening of others.

7. As the providence of God doth in general reach to all creatures, so after a most special manner it taketh care of his church, and disposeth all things for the good thereof.

---

### CHAPTER SIXTH.

#### OF THE FALL OF MAN, OF SIN, AND OF THE PUNISHMENT THEREOF.

God having made a covenant of works and life there-upon, with our first parents, and all their posterity in them, they being seduced by the subtily and temptation of satan, did wilfully transgress the law of their creation, and break the covenant by eating the forbidden fruit.

2. By this sin they, and we in them, fell from original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.

3. They being the root, and by God's appointment standing in the room and stead of all mankind, the guilt of this sin is imputed, and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation.

4. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

5. This corruption of nature during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be through Christ pardoned and mortified, yet both itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin.

6. Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary therunto, doth in its own nature bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal and eternal.

---

## CHAPTER SEVENTH.

### OF GOD'S COVENANT WITH MAN.

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures, do owe obedience to him as their creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of life, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.

2. The first covenant made with man, was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.

3. Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace, wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his holy Spirit to make them willing and able to believe.

4. This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the testator, and to the everlasting

inheritance; with all things belonging to it therein bequeathed.

5. Although this covenant hath been differently and variously administered in respect of ordinances and institutions in the time of the law, and since the coming of Christ in the flesh ; yet for the substance and efficacy of it, to all its spiritual and saving ends, it is one and the same ; upon the account of which various dispensations, it is called the Old and New Testament.

---

## CHAPTER EIGHTH. OF CHRIST THE MEDIATOR.

It pleased God in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, according to a covenant made between them both, to be the mediator between God and man ; the prophet, priest, and king, the head and Saviour of his church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world : unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified and glorified.

2. The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance : so that two whole, perfect and distinct natures, the god-head and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one per-

son, without conversion, composition, or confusion ; which person, is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

2. The Lord Jesus in his human nature, thus united to the divine in the person of the Son, was sanctified and anointed with the holy Spirit above measure ; having in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, in whom it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell, to the end that being holy, harmless, undefiled and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a mediator and surety ; which office he took not unto himself, but was thereunto called by his Father, who also put all power and judgment into his hands, and gave him commandment to execute the same.

4. This office the Lord Jesus Christ did most willingly undertake ; which that he might discharge, he was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it, and underwent the punishment due to us which we should have borne and suffered, being made sin and a curse for us, enduring most grievous torments immediately from God in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body, was crucified, and died, was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption ; on the third day he arose from the dead with the same body in which he suffered, with which also he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of his Father, making intercession, and shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the world.

5. The Lord Jesus by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of God, and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.

6. Although the work of redemption was not actually by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy and benefits thereof communicated to the elect in all ages, successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types and sacrifices, wherein he was revealed and signified to be the seed of the woman, which should bruise the serpent's head, and the lamb, slain from the beginning of the world, being yesterday and to-day the same, and forever.

7. Christ in the work of mediation acteth according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; yet by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature, is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature.

8. To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them, and revealing unto them in and by the word, mysteries of salvation, effectually persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by his word and Spirit, overcoming all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner and ways as are most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.

---

## CHAPTER NINTH.

### OF FREE-WILL.

God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty and power of acting upon choice, that it is neither

forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determin-ed to do good or evil.

2. Man in his state of innocency had freedom and power to will and to do that which was good and well-pleasing to God ; but yet mutably, so that he might fall from it.

3. Man by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying sal-vation, so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself there-unto.

4. When God converts a sinner, and translates him into a state of grace, he freeth him from his natural bond-age under sin, and by his grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good ; yet so, as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.

5. The will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to good alone in the state of glory only.

---

## CHAPTER TENTH.

### OF EFFECTUAL CALLING.

All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call by his word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ, enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh, renewing their wills, and by his

almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ : yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.

2. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until being quickened and renewed by the holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.

3. Elect infants dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth : so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word.

4. Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet not being effectually drawn by the Father, they neither do nor can come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved ; much less can men not professing the christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of that religion they do profess : and to assert and maintain that they may, is very pernicious, and to be detested.

---

## CHAPTER ELEVENTH.

### OF JUSTIFICATION.

Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous, not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone ; nor

by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness, but by imputing Christ's active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his sufferings and death, for their whole and sole righteousness, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

2. Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.

3. Christ by his obedience and death did fully discharge the debt of all those that are justified, and did by the sacrifice of himself, in the blood of his cross, undergoing in their stead the penalty due unto them, make a proper, real and full satisfaction to God's justice in their behalf: yet inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for any thing in them, their justification is only of free grace, that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

4. God did from all eternity decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did in the fulness of time die for their sins and rise again for their justification. Nevertheless, they are not justified personally, until the holy Spirit doth in due time actually apply Christ unto them.

5. God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may by their sins fall under God's fatherly displeasure: and in that condition they have not usually the light of his countenance restor-

ed unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

6. The justification of believers under the Old Testament, was in all these respects one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.

---

## CHAPTER TWELFTH.

### OF ADOPTION.

All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth in and for his only Son Jesus Christ to make partakers of the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God, have his name put upon them, receive the spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, are enabled to cry abba Father, are pitied, protected, provided for and chastened by him as by a father, yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption, and inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation.

---

## CHAPTER THIRTEENTH.

### OF SANCTIFICATION.

They that are effectually called and regenerated, being united to Christ, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, are also further sanctified really and per-

sonally through the same virtue, by his word and Spirit dwelling in them, the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of all holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord

2. This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abide still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

3 In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail, yet through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome, and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

## CHAPTER FOURTEENTH.

### OF SAVING FAITH.

The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the word; by which also, and by the administration of the seals, prayer, and other means, it is increased and strengthened.

2. By this faith a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the word, for the authority of God himself speaketh therein, and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth, yield-

ing obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone, for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

3. This faith although it be different in degrees, and may be weak or strong, yet it is in the least degree of it different in the kind or nature of it (as is all other saving grace) from the faith and common grace of temporary believers ; and therefore, though it may be many times assailed and weakened, yet it gets the victory, growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.

---

## CHAPTER FIFTEENTH.

### OF REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE AND SALVATION.

Such of the elect as are converted at riper years, having sometime lived in the state of nature, and therein served divers lusts and pleasures, God in their effectual calling giveth them repentance unto life.

2. Whereas there is none that doth good, and sinneth not, and the best of men may through the power and deceitfulness of their corruptions dwelling in them, with the prevalency of temptation, fall into great sins and provocations ; God hath in the covenant of grace mercifully provided that believers so sinning and falling, be renewed through repentance unto salvation.

3. This saving repentance is an evangelical grace, whereby a person being by the Holy Ghost made sensible of the manifold evils of his sin, doth by faith in Christ humble himself for it with godly sorrow, detestation of it, and self-abhorrency, praying for pardon and strength of grace, with a purpose and endeavor by supplies of the Spirit, to walk before God unto all well-pleasing in all things.

4. As repentance is to be continued through the whole course of our lives, upon the account of the body of death, and the motions thereof; so it is every man's duty to repent of his particular known sins, particularly.

5. Such is the provision which God hath made through Christ in the covenant of grace, for the preservation of believers unto salvation, that although there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation, yet there is no sin so great, that it shall bring damnation on them who truly repent; which makes the constant preaching of repentance necessary.

---

## CHAPTER SIXTEENTH.

### OF GOOD WORKS.

Good works are only such as God hath commanded in his holy word, and not such as without the warrant thereof are devised by men out of blind zeal, or upon any pretence of good intentions.

2. These good works done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and living faith, and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren,

adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto, that having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end eternal life.

3. Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ : and that they may be enabled thereunto, besides the graces they have already received, there is required an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit to work in them to will and to do, of his good pleasure ; yet are they not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty, unless upon a special motion of the Spirit, but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them.

4. They who in their obedience attain to the greatest height which is possible in this life, are so far from being able to supererrogate, and to do more than God requires, as that they fall short of much, which in duty they are bound to do.

5. We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin, or eternal life at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them, and the glory to come ; and the infinite distance that is between us, and God, whom by them we can neither profit, nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins ; but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants. And because as they are good, they proceed from his Spirit, and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment.

6. Yet notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him, not as though they were in this life wholly

unblameable and unreprovable in God's sight, but that he looking upon them in his Son is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.

7. Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them, they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others ; yet because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner, according to the word, nor to a right end, the glory of God ; they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, nor make a man meet to receive grace from God ; and yet their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing to God.

---

## CHAPTER SEVENTEENTH.

### OF THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

They whom God hath accepted in his beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

2. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free-will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, and union with him, the oath of God, the abiding of the Spirit, and the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace, from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

3. And though they may through the temptation of satan, and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins, and for a time continue therein, whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve his Holy Spirit, come to have their graces and comforts impaired, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded, hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves ; yet they are and shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

---

#### CHAPTER EIGHTEENTH.

#### OF THE ASSURANCE OF GRACE AND SALVATION.

Although temporary believers, and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favor of God, and state of salvation, which hope of theirs shall perish, yet such as truly believe on the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in a state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed.

2. This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope, but an infallible assurance of faith, founded on the blood and righteousness of Christ, revealed in the gospel, and also upon the inward evidence of those graces, unto which

promises are made, and on the immediate witness of the Spirit, testifying our adoption, and as a fruit thereof, leaving the heart more humble and holy.

3. This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it ; yet being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means attain thereunto : And therefore it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance ; so far is it from inclining men to looseness.

4. True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished and intermitted, as by negligence in preserving of it, by falling into some special sin, which woundeth the conscience, and grieveth the Spirit, by some sudden or vehement temptation, by God's withdrawing the light of his countenance, suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness, and to have no light, yet are they neither utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty, out of which by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived, and by the which in the mean time they are supported from utter despair.

**CHAPTER NINETEEN.****OF THE LAW OF GOD.**

God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact and perpetual obedience, promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.

2. This law so written in the heart, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall of man, and was delivered by God on mount Sinai in ten commandments, and written in two tables, the first four commandments containing our duty towards God, and the other six our duty to man.

3. Beside this law commonly called moral, God was pleased to give the children of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings and benefits, and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties : all which ceremonial laws being appointed only to the time of reformation, are by Jesus Christ the true Messiah and only law-giver, who was furnished with power from the Father for that end, abrogated and taken away.

4. To them also he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any now by virtue of that institution, their general equity only being still of moral use.

5. The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.

6. Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned, yet it is of great use to them as well as to others, in that, as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God, and their duty, and directs and binds them to walk accordingly, discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts and lives, so as examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin, together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of his obedience. It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin, and the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve, and what afflictions in this life they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. The promises of it in like manner show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof, although not as due to them by the law, as a covenant of works; so as a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law, and not under grace.

7. Neither are the fore-mentioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it, the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely and cheerfully which the will of God revealed in the law required to be done.

**CHAPTER TWENTIETH.****OF THE GOSPEL AND OF THE EXTENT OF  
THE GRACE THEREOF.**

The covenant of works being broken by sin, and made unprofitable unto life, God was pleased to give unto the elect the promise of Christ, the seed of the woman, as the means of calling them, and begetting in them faith and repentance. In this promise, the gospel, as to the substance of it, was revealed, and was therein effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners.

2. This promise of Christ, and salvation by him, is revealed only in and by the word of God ; neither do the works of creation or providence, with the light of nature, make discovery of Christ, or of grace by him, so much as in a general or obscure way ; much less that men destitute of the revelation of him by the promise or gospel, should be enabled thereby to obtain saving faith or repentance.

3. The revelation of the gospel unto sinners, made in divers times, and by sundry parts, with the addition of promises and precepts for the obedience required therein, as to the nations and persons to whom it is granted, is merely of the sovereign will and good pleasure of God, not being annexed by virtue of any promise to the due improvement of men's natural abilities, by virtue of common light received without it, which none ever did make, or can so do. And therefore in all ages the preaching of the gospel hath been granted unto persons and nations, as to the extent or straitening of it, in great variety, according to the counsel of the will of God.

4. Although the gospel be the only outward means of

revealing Christ and saving grace, and is, as such, abundantly sufficient thereunto ; yet that men who are dead in trespasses, may be born again, quickened or regenerated, there is moreover necessary an effectual, irresistible work of the Holy Ghost upon the whole soul, for the producing in them a new spiritual life, without which no other means are sufficient for their conversion unto God.

---

### CHAPTER TWENTY FIRST.

#### OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY, AND LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE.

The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel, consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the rigor and curse of the law, and in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to satan, and dominion of sin, from the evil of afflictions, the fear and sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation, as also in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind : All which were common also to believers under the law, for the substance of them, but under the new testament, the liberty of christians is further enlarged in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, the whole legal administration of the covenant of grace to which the Jewish church was subjected, and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of

2. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left

it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to his word, or not contained in it ; so that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience, and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

3. They who upon pretence of christian liberty do practise any sin, or cherish any lust, as they do thereby pervert the main design of the grace of the gospel to their own destruction, so they wholly destroy the end of christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

---

## CHAPTER TWENTY SECOND.

### OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP, AND OF THE SABBATH DAY.

The light of nature sheweth that there is a God, who hath a lordship and sovereignty over all, is just, good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and all the soul, and with all the might : But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the holy scripture.

**2. Religious worship is to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and to him alone ; not to angels, saints, or any other creatures ; and since the fall, not without a mediator, nor in the mediation of any other but of Christ alone.**

**3. Prayer with thanksgiving, being one special part of natural worship, is by God required of all men ; but that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of his Spirit, according to his will, with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance : And when with others in a known tongue.**

**4. Prayer is to be made for things lawful, and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter, but not for the dead, nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death.**

**5. The reading of the scriptures, preaching and hearing of the word of God, singing of psalms, as also the administration of baptism and the Lord's supper, are all parts of religious worship of God, to be performed in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, reverence and godly fear. Solemn humiliations with fastings and thanksgiving upon special occasions, are in their several times and seasons to be used in an holy and religious manner.**

**6. Neither prayer, nor any other part of religious worship, is now under the gospel either tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed : But God is to be worshipped every where in spirit and in truth, as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself, so more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly nor willfully to be neglected, or forsaken, when God by word or providence calleth thereunto.**

7. As it is of the law of nature, that in general a proportion of time by God's appointment be set apart for the worship of God; so by his word in a positive, moral and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a sabbath to be kept holy unto him, which from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which in scripture is called the Lord's day, and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week being abolished.

8. This sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations, but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

---

### CHAPTER TWENTY THIRD.

#### OF LAWFUL OATHS AND VOWS.

A lawful oath is a part of religious worship, wherein the person swearing in truth, righteousness and judgment, solemnly calleth God to witness what he asserteth or promiseth, and to judge him according to the truth and falsehood of what he sweareth.

2. The name of God only is that by which men ought to swear, and therein it is to be used with all holy fear and reverence: Therefore to swear vainly or rashly by

that glorious and dreadful name, or to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful, and to be abhorred : Yet as in matters of weight and moment an oath is warranted by the word of God, under the New Testament, as well as under the old ; so a lawful oath, being imposed by lawful authority in such matters, ought to be taken.

3. Whosoever taketh an oath warranted by the word of God, ought duly to consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, and therein to avouch nothing but what he is fully persuaded is the truth. Neither may any man bind himself by oath to any thing, but what is good and just, and what he believeth so to be, and what he is able and resolved to perform. Yet it is a sin to refuse an oath touching any thing that is good and just, being lawfully imposed by authority.

4. An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation, or mental reservation. It cannot oblige to sin, but in any thing not sinful being taken, it binds to performance, although to a man's own hurt ; nor is it to be violated, although made to heretics or infidels.

5. A vow, which is not to be made to any creature, but God alone, is of the like nature with a promissory oath, and ought to be made with the like religious care, and to be performed with the like faithfulness.

6. Popish monastical vows of perpetual single life, professed poverty, and regular obedience, are so far from being degrees of higher perfection, that they are superstitious and sinful snares, in which no Christian may entangle himself.

## CHAPTER TWENTY FOURTH. OF THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE.

God the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under him, over the people for his own glory and the public good ; and to this end hath armed them with the power of his sword, for the defence and encouragement of them that do good, and for the punishment of evil-doers.

2. It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto : in the management whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth, so for that end they may lawfully now, under the New Testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasions.

3. They who upon pretence of Christian liberty shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercises of it, resist the ordinance of God, and for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation, or to the power of godliness, or such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the church, and by the power of the civil magistrate. Yet in such differences about the doctrines of the gospel, or ways of the worship of God, as

may beset men exercising a good conscience, manifesting it in their conversation, and holding the foundation, and duly observing the rules of peace and order, there is no warrant for the magistrate to abridge them of their liberty.

4. It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honor their persons, to pay them tribute and other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority for conscience sake. Infidelity, or difference in religion doth not make void the magistrate's just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him; from which ecclesiastical persons are not exempted, much less hath the Pope any power or jurisdiction over them in their dominions, or over any of their people, and least of all to deprive them of their dominions or lives, if he shall judge them to be heretics, or upon any other pretence whatsoever.

## CHAPTER TWENTY FIFTH.

### OF MARRIAGE.

Marriage is to be between one man and one woman; neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband at the same time.

2. Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the church with an holy seed, and for preventing of uncleanness.

3. It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry, who are able with judgment to give their consent. Yet it is the duty of Christians to marry in the Lord, and therefore such

as profess the true reformed religion, should not marry with infidels, papists, or other idolaters: Neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked by marrying such as are wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresy.

4. Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden in the word, nor can such incestuous marriages ever be made lawful by any law of man, or consent of parties, so as those persons may live together as man and wife.

---

## CHAPTER TWENTY SIXTH.

### OF THE CHURCH.

The catholic or universal chnrch, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ the head thereof, and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

2. The whole body of men throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel, and obedience unto God by Christ according to it, not destroying their own profession by any errors everting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation, they and their children with them, are, and may be called the visible catholic church of Christ, although as such it is not entrusted with any officers to rule or govern over the whole body.

3. The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error, and some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of satan; nevertheless Christ always hath had, and ever shall have a visible kingdom in this world, to the end thereof,

of such as believe in him, and make profession of his name.

4. There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ, nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof, but is that anti-christ, that man of sin, and son of perdition that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God, whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

5. As the Lord in his care and love toward his church, hath in his infinite wise providence, exercised it with great variety in all ages for the good of them that love him, and his own glory; so according to his promise, we expect that in the latter days, anti-christ being destroyed, the *Jews* called, and the adversaries of the kingdom of his dear Son broken, the churches of Christ being enlarged and edified, through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, all enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable and glorious condition than they have enjoyed.

---

## CHAPTER TWENTY SEVENTH.

### OF THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

All saints that are united to Jesus Christ, their head, by his Spirit and faith, although they are not made thereby one person with him, have fellowship in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: And being united to one another in love, they have communion in each others' gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.

2. All saints are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification, as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities: which communion, though especially to be exercised by them in the relations wherein they stand, whether in families or in churches, yet as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

---

## CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHTH.

### OF THE SACRAMENTS.

Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by Christ, to represent him and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him, and solemnly to engage us to the service of God in Christ, according to his word.

2. There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.

3. The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them, neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it; but upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.

4. There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ

our Lord in the gospel, that is to say, baptism and the Lord's supper; neither of which may be dispensed by any but a minister of the word lawfully called.

5. The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were for substance the same with those of the New.

---

## CHAPTER TWENTY NINTH.

### OF BAPTISM.

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life; which ordinance is by Christ's own appointment to be continued in his church, until the end of the world.

2. The outward element to be used in this ordinance is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the gospel lawfully called thereunto.

3. Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary, but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person.

4. Not only those that do actually profess faith in, and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptised, and those only.

5. Although it be a great sin to condemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed to it, as that no person can be regenera-

ted or saved without it ; or that all who are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.

6. The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered, yet notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will in his appointed time.

7. Baptism is but once to be administered to any person.

---

## CHAPTER THIRTIETH.

### OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

Our Lord Jesus in the night wherein he was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of his body and blood, called the Lord's supper, to be observed in his churches to the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance, and shewing forth of the sacrifice of himself in his death, the sealing of all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto him, and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other.

2. In this sacrament Christ is not offered up to his Father, nor any real sacrifice made at all for remission of sin of the quick and dead, but only a memorial of that one offering up of himself upon the cross once for all, and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God for the same ; so that the popish sacrifice of the mass (as they

call it) is most abominable injurious to Christ's own only sacrifice, the alone propitiation for all the sins of the elect.

3. The Lord Jesus hath in this ordinance appointed his ministers to declare his word of institution to the people, to pray and bless the elements of bread and wine and thereby to set them apart from a common to an holy use, and to take and break the bread, to take the cup, and (they communicating also themselves) to give both to the communicants, but to none who are not then present in the congregation.

3. Private masses, or receiving the sacrament by a priest, or any other alone, as likewise the denial of the cup to the people, worshipping the elements, the lifting them up, or carrying them about for adoration, and the reserving them for any pretended religious use, are all contrary to the nature of this sacrament, and to the institution of Christ.

5. The outward elements in this sacrament duly set apart for the uses ordained by Christ, have such relation to him crucified, as that truly, yet sacramentally only, they are sometimes called by the name of the things they represent, to wit, the body and blood of Christ; albeit in substance and nature they still remain truly and only bread and wine as they were before.

6. That doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of bread and wine, into the substance of Christ's body and blood, (commonly called transubstantiation) by consecration of a priest, or any other way, is repugnant not to the Scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason, overthroweth the nature of the sacrament, and hath been, and is the cause of manifold superstitions, yea, of gross idolatries.

7. Worthy receivers outwardly partaking of the vis-

ble elements in this sacrament; do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death; the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally in, with or under the bread and wine, yet as really but spiritually present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements are themselves to their outward senses.

8. All ignorant and ungodly persons as they are unfit to enjoy communion with Christ, so are they unworthy of the Lord's table, and cannot without great sin against him, whilst they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto; yea, whosoever shall receive unworthily, are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, eating and drinking judgment to themselves.

---

### CHAPTER THIRTY FIRST.

#### OF THE STATE OF MAN AFTER DEATH, AND OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.

The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption, but their souls (which neither die nor sleep) having an immortal substance immediately return to God, who gave them, the souls of the righteous being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies: And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torment, and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day: Besides these two places of souls separated from their bodies, the scripture acknowledgeth none.

2. At the last day such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed, and all the dead shall be raised up with the self-same bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls for ever.

3. The bodies of the unjust shall by the power of Christ be raised to dishonor ; the bodies of the just by his Spirit unto honor, and be made conformable to his own glorious body.

---

## CHAPTER THIRTY SECOND.

### OF THE LAST JUDGMENT.

God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by JESUS CHRIST, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father ; in which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth, shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.

2. The end of God's appointing this day, is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect, and of his justice in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient : For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and glory, with everlasting reward in the presence of the Lord, but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with

everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

3. As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity ; so will he have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come, and may be ever prepared to say, *Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.* AMEN.

## **APPENDIX.**

CONGREGATIONAL AND PRESBYTERIAN

## **HEADS OF AGREEMENT.**

---

A good understanding, attended with much harmony of feeling and action, has existed between the Congregationalists and Presbyterians from the beginning. The endeavors of many good and discerning men have been exerted to promote this harmony; deeming it to be an object, intimately connected with the peace and interests of Zion. In the year 1690 an important paper was drawn up by the ministers of London, for the purpose of laying a broad basis of union between the two sects; in the formation of which Increase Mather, then resident in England, is said to have been highly instrumental. These articles or heads of agreement are as follows:

### **I. *Of Churches and Church Members.***

We acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ to have one Catholic Church or Kingdom, comprehending all that are united to him, whether in heaven or earth. And do conceive the whole multitude of visible believers, and their infant seed, (commonly called the Catholic visible Church) to belong to Christ's spiritual kingdom in this world. But for the notion of a Catholic visible Church here, as it signifies its having been collected into any formed society, under a visible common head on earth, whether one person singly, or many collectively, we, with the rest of Protestants, unanimously disclaim it. Eph. i. 10, 22, and 44. Eph. v. 27. 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13. Gen. xvii. 7. Acts ii. 39. Mat. xxiii. 7 —10.

**II. We agree, that particular societies of visible saints,**

who, under Christ their head, are stately joined together, for ordinary communion with one another in all the ordinances of Christ, are *particular churches*, and are to be owned by each other, as instituted churches of Christ, though differing in *apprehensions* and *practice*, in some lesser things. 1 Cor. xiv. 2, 3, and i. 2. and xii. 27. Rev. i. 4. Rom. xiv. 1.

III. That none shall be admitted as members, in order to communion in all the special ordinances of the gospel, but such persons as are knowing and sound in the *fundamental doctrine of the Christian religion*, without scandal in their lives; and to a judgment regulated by the word of God, are persons of visible holiness and honesty; credibly professing cordial subjection to *Jesus Christ*. Pro. xix. 2. Acts viii. 32. 2 Tim. ii. 19. Ezek. xliv. 9. Rom. x. 10. 2 Cor ix. 13.

IV. A competent number of such *visible saints*, (as before described) do become the capable subjects of stated communion in all the *special ordinances of Christ* upon their mutual declared consent and agreement to *walk together therein according to gospel rule*. In which declaration, different degrees of *explicitness*, shall no ways hinder such churches from owning each other, as instituted churches. 1 Cor. xiv. 23. Acts xx. 7, and ii. 41, 42. Rom. xiv. 3.

V. Though *parochial bounds* be not of *divine right*, yet for common edification, the members of a particular church ought (as much as conveniently may be) to live near one another. 1 Thess. v. 11, 12, 13. Heb. x. 25.

VI. That each *particular church* hath right to choose their own officers; and being furnished with such as are duly qualified and ordained according to the gospel rule, hath authority from Christ for exercising government, and of enjoying all the ordinances of worship within itself. Acts vi. 2. Titus i. 5, 6, 7. 1 Tim. iv. 14. Mat. xviii. 17. 2 Cor. xi. 2.

VII. In the administration of church power, it belongs to the Pastors and other Elders of every particular church, if such there be, to rule and govern, and to the brotherhood to consent according to the rule of the gospel. 1 Tim. v. 17. Heb. iii. 17. 1 Cor. iv. 1, and v. 4. 2 Cor. vi. 8, 10.

VIII. That all professors as before described, are bound in duty, as they have opportunity to join themselves as *fired members* of some particular Church; their thus joining, being part of their professed subjection to the gospel of Christ, and an instituted means of their establishment and edification; whereby they are under the pastoral care, and in case of scandalous or offensive walking, may be authoritatively admonished or censured for their recovery, for vindication of the truth, and the church professing it. Acts ii. 47, and v. 13. 2 Cor. x. 13. Heb. x. 24, 25. 1 Thess. v. 12, 14. Acts xx. 28.

IX. That a *Visible Professor*, thus joined to a particular Church ought to continue steadfast with the said church; and not forsake the ministry, and ordinances there dispensed, without an orderly seeking a recommendation unto another Church, which ought to be given, when the case of the person apparently requires it. Acts ii. 42. Heb. x. 25. Rom. xvi. 1, 2.

---

## II. *Of the Ministry.*

I. We agree that the ministerial office is constituted by Jesus Christ for the gathering, guiding, edifying and governing of his church; and to continue to the end of the world. Eph. iv. 11, 12. Mat. xxviii. 19, 20.

II. They who are called to this office ought to be endued with competent learning and ministerial gifts, as also with the grace of God, sound in judgment, not novices in the faith and knowledge of the gospel; without scandal of holy conversation, and such as devote themselves to the work and service thereof. 2 Tim. ii. 24. Rom. xii. 6. 1 Tim. iii. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. Tit. i. 6, 7. 1 Tim. iv. 16.

III. That ordinarily none shall be ordained to the work of this ministry, but such as are called and chosen thereunto by a particular church. Acts xiv. 23.

IV. That in so great and weighty a matter as the calling and choosing a pastor, we judge it ordinarily re-

quisite, that every such church consult and advise with the pastors of neighboring congregations. Prov. xi. 14, and xv. 22.

V. That after such advice, the persons consulted about being chosen by the brotherhood of that particular church over which he is to be set, and he accepting, be duly ordained and set apart to his office over them; wherein 'tis ordinarily requisite that the pastors of *neighboring congregations* concur with the preaching Elder or Elders, if such there be. Acts xiv. 23. i. 23. & xiii. 23. 1 Tim. iv. 14.

VI. That whereas, such ordination only is intended for such as *never before had been* ordained to the ministerial office; if any judge, that in case also of the *removal of one formerly ordained*, to a new station, or pastoral charge, there ought to be a like solemn recommending him and his labors to the grace and blessing of God, no different sentiments or practice herein, shall be any occasion of contention, or breach of communion among us. Phil. iii. 15. Eph. iv. 2, 3.

VII. It is expedient that they who enter on the work of preaching the gospel, be not only qualified for the communion of saints; but also, that except in *cases extraordinary*, they give proof of their gifts and fitness for the work, unto the pastors of churches of known abilities, to discern and judge of their qualifications; that they may be sent forth with solemn approbation and prayer; which we judge needful, that no doubt may remain concerning their being called unto the work; and for preventing (as much as in us lieth) ignorant and rash intruders. 1 Tim. i. 22, and iii. 6.

### III. *Of Censures.*

I. As it cannot be avoided, but that in the purest churches on earth, there will sometimes offences and scandals arise by reason of hypocrisy and prevailing corruption, so Christ hath made it the duty of every church to reform itself, by spiritual remedies, appointed by him,

to be applied in all such cases, viz. Admonition and Excommunication. Mat. viii. 7. Heb. xii. 15. Titus iii. 10. 1 Cor. v. 6.

II. Admonition, being the rebuking of an offending member in order to conviction, is in case of private offences to be performed according to the rule in Mat. xviii. 15, 16, 17, and in case of public offences openly before the church, as the honor of the gospel, and the nature of the scandal shall require, and if either of the admonitions take place for the recovery of the *fallen person*, all further proceedings in a way of censure are thereon to cease, and satisfaction to be declared accordingly. 1 Tim. i, 20. Mat. xviii. 15, 17.

III. When all due means are used, according to the order of the gospel, for the restoring an offending and scandalous brother, and he, notwithstanding, remains impenitent, the censure of excommunication is to be proceeded unto; wherein the pastor and other elders (if there be such) are to lead and go before the Church; and the brotherhood to give their consent in a way of obedience unto Christ, and to the Elders, as over them in the Lord Mat. xviii, 15, 16, 17. Tit. iii. 10. 1 Cor. v. 1 Thes. v. 5, 12.

IV. It may sometimes come to pass, that a church member, not otherwise scandalous, may *fully withdraw*, and divide himself from the communion of the Church to which he belongeth. In which case, when all due means for the reducing him prove ineffectual, he having thereby cut himself off from that church's communion; the church may justly esteem and declare itself discharged of any further inspection over him. Heb. x. 25. Rom. xvi. 17. 2 Thes. iii. 14.

#### IV. *Of Communion of Churches.*

I. We agree that particular churches ought not to walk so distinct and separate from each other, as not to have care and tenderness towards one another. But

their pastors ought to have frequent meetings together, that by mutual advice, support, encouragement and brotherly intercourse, they may strengthen the hearts and hands of each other in the ways of the Lord. Acts. xv. 23, and xx. 17, 28.

II. That none of our particular churches shall be subordinate to one another, each being endued with equality of power from Jesus Christ. And that none of the said particular churches, their officer or officers, shall exercise any power, or have any superiority over any other church or their officers. Rev. i. 4. Cant. viii. 8. 1 Cor. xvi. 19. Acts xv. 23.

III. That known members of particular churches constituted as aforesaid, may have occasional communion with one another in the ordinances of the gospel, viz.: the *Word, Prayer, Sacraments, Singing of Psalms*, dispensed according to the mind of Christ: unless that church with which they desire communion, hath any just exception against them. Acts xviii. 27. Rom. xvi. 1, 2. 2 Cor. iii. 1. 1 Cor. xii. 13.

IV. That we ought not to admit any one to be a member of our respective congregations, that hath joined himself to another, without endeavors of mutual satisfaction of the congregation concerned. Heb. xiii. 1. 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

V. That one church ought not to blame the proceedings of another, until it hath heard what the elders or messengers of the church charged, can say in vindication of themselves, from any charge of irregular or injurious proceedings. Matt. vii. 1. Prov. xviii. 17. Deut. xiii. 14.

VI. That we are most willing and ready to give an account of our church proceedings to each other, when desired, for preventing or removing any offences that may arise among us. Likewise we shall be ready to give the Right Hand of Fellowship, and walk together according to the gospel rules of communion of churches. 1 Pet. iii. 15. Rom. xiv. 19. Acts xi. 2, 3, 4, 18. Josh. xxii. 13, 21, 30. Gal. ii. 9. Col. ii. 5. 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11. 1 Cor. x. 24. Rom. i. 15. Gal. vi. 10.

*V. Of Deacons and Ruling Elders.*

We agree, the office of a Deacon is of divine appointment, and that it belongs to their office to receive, lay out, and distribute the church's stock to its proper uses, by the direction of the pastor and brethren, if need be. And whereas, divers are of opinion, that there is also the office of Ruling Elders, who labor not in word and doctrine, and others think otherwise; we agree that this difference make no breach among us. Acts vi. 3, 5, 6. Phil. i. 1. 1 Tim. iii. 8—13. Rom. xii. 8. 1 Cor. xii. 28. 1 Tim. v. 17. Phil. iii. 15, 16.

---

*VI. Of occasional Meeting of Ministers, &c.*

I. We agree that in order to concord, and in other weighty and difficult cases, it is needful and according to the mind of Christ, that the ministers of the several churches be consulted and advised with about such matters. Prov. xxiv. 6. Acts xv. 26.

II. That such meetings may consist of smaller or greater numbers, as the matter shall require.

III. That particular churches, their respective elders and members, ought to have a reverential regard to their judgment, so given, and not dissent therefrom without apparent grounds from the word of God. Acts xvi. 4, 5. 1 Cor. xiv. 32, 33. Gal. i. 8. 1 Pet. iv. 11.

---

*VII. Of our Demeanor towards the Civil Magistrate.*

We do reckon ourselves obliged continually to pray for God's protection, guidance and blessing, upon the rulers set over us. 1 Tim. ii. 2. Psal. xx. 1—4, and lxxii. 1.

II. That we ought to yield unto them not only subjec-

tion in the Lord, but support, according to our station and abilities. Matt. xxii. 21. Rom. xiii. 5, 6. Neh. v. 18.

III That if at any time, it shall be their pleasure to call together any number of us, to require an account of our affairs, and the state of our congregations, we shall most readily express all dutiful regard to them herein. Isa. xl ix. 23. 2 Chron. xxix. 4—11. Rom. xiii. 1. Tit. iii. 1.

---

### VIII. *Of a Confession of Faith.*

As to what appertains to soundness of judgment in matters of faith, we esteem it sufficient that a church acknowledge the Scriptures to be the word of God, the perfect and only rule of faith and practice, and own either the doctrinal part of those commonly called the Articles of the Church of England, or the Confession or Catechisms, shorter or larger, compiled by the Assembly at Westminster, or the Confession agreed on at the Savoy, to be agreeable to the said rule. 2 Tim. i. 13. Eph. iv. 5. Phil. ii. 1, 2.

---

### IX. *Of our Duty and Deportment towards them that are not in Communion with us.*

I. We judge it our duty to bear a Christian respect to all Christians, according to their several ranks and stations, that are not of our persuasion or communion. 1 Pet. ii. 17. Rom. xii. 10. Gal. vi. 2. Eph. iv. 2. Rom. xiv. tot.

II. As for such as may be ignorant of the principles of the Christian religion, or of *vicious conversation*, we shall in our respective places as they give opportunity, endeavor to explain to them the doctrine of life and sal-

vation, and to our utmost persuade them to be reconciled to God. 2 Tim. ii. 25. 2 Cor. v. 11, 20.

III. That such who appear to have the essential requisites to church communion, we shall willingly receive them in the Lord, not troubling them with disputes about lesser matters. Rom. xiv. 1.

As we assent to the forementioned *Heads of Agreement*, so we unanimously resolve, as the Lord shall enable us to practise according to them.

---

## SAYBROOK ARTICLES OF DISCIPLINE.

The ministers of Connecticut met together in Synod in the year 1708. "The Cambridge Platform," says Trumbull's History of Connecticut, chap. xix. "which, for about sixty years, had been the general plan of discipline and church fellowship in New England, made no provision for the general meeting of ministers, or for their union in associations or consociations," &c. To supply this defect, as far as the churches of Connecticut were concerned, seems to have been a principal object of their meeting together.

When assembled, they owned, and consented to the Congregational Confession of Faith, which had been adopted in 1680, as already given, with the addition, as it would seem, of Scripture references of their own. They also owned, and consented to the Congregational and Presbyterian Heads of Agreement, which were framed in 1662, and form the first Article of this Appendix. But their principal work was the drawing up of the following fifteen Articles for the administration of church discipline, which have laid the foundation for methods of procedure in Connecticut, somewhat different from those of the great body of the churches.

I. That the Elder or Elders of a particular church, with the consent of the Brethren of the same, have power and ought to exercise church discipline according to the rule of God's word, in relation to all scandals that fall

out within the same. And it may be meet in all cases of difficulty for the respective pastors of particular churches, to take advice of the elders of the churches in the neighborhood, before they proceed to censure in such cases. Mat. xviii. 17. Heb. xiii. 17. 1 Cor. v. 4, 5, 12. 2 Cor. ii. 6. Prov. xi. 14. Acts xv. 12.

II. That the churches which are neighboring each to the other, shall consociate for mutually affording to each other such assistance as may be requisite, upon all occasion ecclesiastical. And that the particular pastors and churches, within the respective counties in this government, shall be one consociation (or more if they shall judge meet,) for the end aforesaid. Psal. cxxii. 3, 4, 5, and cxxxiii. 1. Eccl. iv. 9—12. Acts xv. 2, 6, 22, 23. 1 Tim. iv. 14. 1 Cor. xvi. 1.

III. That all cases of Scandal that fall out within the circuit of any of the aforesaid consociations shall be brought to a council of the Elders, and also messengers of the churches within the said circuit, i. e. the churches of one consociation, if they see cause to send messengers, when there shall be need of a council for the determination of them. 3 John ix. 10. 1 Cor. xvi. 1. Gal. vi. 1, 2. 2 Cor. xiii. 2. Acts xv. 22, 2 Cor. viii. 23.

IV. That according to the common practice of our churches, nothing shall be deemed an act or judgment of any council, which hath not the *major part of the Elders* present concurring, and such a number of the messengers present as makes the majority of the council: Provided that if any such church shall not see cause to send any messengers to the council, or the persons chosen by them shall not attend; neither of these shall be any obstruction to the proceedings of the council, or invalidate any of their acts. Acts xv. 23 1 Cor. xiv. 32, 33.

V. That when any case is orderly brought before any council of the churches, it shall there be heard and determined, which (unless orderly removed from thence) shall be a final issue and all parties therein concerned shall sit down and be determined thereby. And the council, so hearing, and giving the result or final issue, in the said case as aforesaid, shall see their determination, or judgment duly executed and attended in such way or manner,

as shall in their judgment be most suitable and agreeable to the word of God. Acts xv. I Cor. v. 5; II Cor. ii. 6, 11, and xiii. 2; Phil. iii. 15; Rom. xiv. 2, 3.

VI. That, if any Pastor and church doth obstinately refuse a due attendance and conformity to the determination of the council, that hath the cognisance of the case, and determineth it as above, after due patience used, they shall be reputed guilty of scandalous contempt and dealt with as the rule of God's word in such case doth provide, and the sentence of non-communion shall be declared against such Pastor and church. And the churches are to approve of the said sentence, by withdrawing from the communion of the Pastor and church which so refuseth to be healed. Rom. xiv. 17; Mat. xviii. 15, 16, 17, by proportion. Gal. ii. 11—14; II Thess. iii. 6, 14.

VII. That in case any difficulties shall arise in any of the churches in this colony, which cannot be issued without considerable disquiet, that church, in which they arise (or that minister, or member aggrieved by them,) shall apply themselves to the council of the consociated churches of the circuit, to which the said church belongs, who, if they see cause, shall thereupon convene, hear and determine such cases of difficulty; unless the matter brought before them, shall be judged so great in the nature of it, or so doubtful in the issue, or of such general concern, that the said council shall judge best that it be referred to a fuller council, consisting of the churches of the other consociation within the same county, (or of the next adjoining consociation of another county, if there be not two consociations in the county where the difficulty ariseth,) who together with themselves shall hear, judge, determine and finally issue such case according to the word of God. Pro. xi. 14; I Cor. xiv. 33, and xiv. 24, by proportion.

VIII. That a particular church, in which any difficulty doth arise, may, if they see cause, call a council of the consociated churches of the circuit, to which the said church belongs, before they proceed to sentence therein; but there is not the same liberty to an offending brother to call the said council, before the church to which he belongs proceed to excommunication in the said case, ni

unless with the consent of the church. Acts xv. 2; Mat. xviii. 15, 16, 17.

IX. That all the churches of the respective consociations shall choose, if they see cause, one or two members of each church, to represent them in the councils of the said churches, as occasion may call for them, who shall stand in that capacity, till new be chosen for the same service, unless any church shall incline to choose their messengers anew, upon the convening of such councils. Acts xv. 2, 4; II Cor. viii. 23.

X. That the minister or ministers of the county towns, and where there are no ministers in such towns, the two next ministers to the said town, shall, as soon as conveniently may be, appoint a time and place, for the meeting of the Elders and messengers of the churches in the said county, in order to their forming themselves into one or more consociations, and notify the said time and place to the Elders and churches of that county, who still attend at the same, the Elders in their own persons, and the churches by their messengers, if they see cause to send them. Which Elders and messengers so assembled in council, as also any other council hereby allowed of, shall have power to adjourn themselves as need shall be, for the space of one year, after the beginning or first session of the said council, and no longer. And that minister, who was chosen at the last session of any council, to be moderator, shall, with the advice and consent of two more Elders, (or in case of the moderator's death, any two Elders of the same consociation,) call another council within the circuit, when they shall judge there is need thereof. And all councils may prescribe rules as occasion may require, and whatsoever they shall judge needful within their circuit, for the well performing, and orderly managing their several Acts, to be attended by them, or matters that come under their cognizance. Phil. iv. 2; I Cor. xiv. 40; Phil. iii. 15, 16; Rom. xiv. 2, 3.

XI. That if any person or persons orderly complained of to a council, or that are witnesses to such complaints, (having regular notification to appear,) shall refuse or neglect so to do, in the place, and at the time specified in the warning given, except they or he give some satisfying reason thereof to the said council, they shall be

judged guilty of scandalous contempt. Col. ii. 5; Heb. xiii. 17; I Thess. v. 14.

XII. That the teaching Elders of each county shall be one association, (or more if they see cause,) which association or associations shall assemble twice a year at least, at such time and place as they shall appoint, to consult the duties of their office, and the common interest of the churches, who shall consider and resolve questions and cases of importance which shall be offered by any among themselves, or others, who also shall have power of examining and recommending the candidates of the ministry to the work thereof. Ps. cxxxiii. 1; Acts xx. 17, 28—32; Mal. ii. 7; Mat. v. 14; Deut. xvii. 8, 9, 10; I Tim. v. 22; II Tim. ii. 15; I Tim. iii. 6, 10; Rom. x. 15; I Tim. iv. 14.

XIII. That the said associated pastors shall take notice of any among themselves, that may be accused of scandal, or heresy unto, or cognizable by them, examine the matter carefully, and if they find just occasion shall direct to the calling of the council, where such offenders shall be duly proceeded against. Lev. xix. 17; I Cor. v. 6; Tit. iii. 10, 11; Isa. liii. 11; Mal. iii. 8; Tit. i. 6—9; Deut. xiii. 14; III John ix. 10; Rev. ii. 14, 15; I Tim. i. 20, and iv. 14.

XIV. That the said associated pastors shall also be consulted by bereaved churches, belonging to their association and recommend to such churches, such persons as may be fit to be called and settled in the work of the gospel ministry among them. And if such bereaved churches shall not seasonably call and settle a minister among them, the said associated pastors shall lay the state of such bereaved churches before the General Assembly of this colony, that they may take such order concerning them, as shall be found necessary for their peace and edification. II Cor. xi. 28; Phil. iii. 19; 20, 21; II Tim. ii. 15; Tit. i. 6—10; Isa. xlit. 23.

XV. That it be recommended as expedient, that all the associations of this colony do meet in a general association by their respective delegates, one or more out of each association once a year, the first meeting to be at Hartford at the time of the general election next ensuing the date hereof, and so annually in all the counties suc-

cessively, at such time and place, as they the said delegates shall in their annual meetings appoint. Heb. xiii. 1.

### EXPLANATORY ARTICLE.

It appears, that some difference of opinion or some misunderstanding, as already intimated at § 160, had arisen in respect to Article XIII. At a session of the General Association of Connecticut in 1822, a committee previously appointed for the purpose, made the following report in respect to that article.—

'That, having examined all the articles of the Saybrook Platform, they are decidedly of opinion, that there is nothing contained in the twelve first articles, which refers at all to the subject of accusing or arraigning a pastor before a Consociation; but what they contain on the subject of accusation and trial for scandal or heresy, refers exclusively to churches, and the private members of churches. They furthermore conceive, that the 13th article is decisive, that it is the duty of an Association to receive an accusation against a pastor belonging to it, and to make provision for his trial before the Consociation; and your committee are convinced, that the Platform does not warrant a Consociation to receive an accusation against a pastor, unless it come through the hands of the Association, of which he is a member. Such must be the procedure in all Consociations, which have no constitution except the Saybrook Platform. While your Committee assert this without hesitation, to prevent any misapprehension, they state, that they are well aware, that there are in Connecticut Consociations, which have other written constitutions, containing express provision for bringing a complaint against a pastor directly to the Consociation, and authorizing the Consociation without any intercourse with an Association, to proceed directly to a trial of him.'

## LEGAL RIGHTS

## OF CHURCHES AND PARISHES.

*Churches are corporate bodies.—Power of the churches to hold property.—A church ought not to lose its property in consequence of separating from the parish.—Nature and powers of parishes.—Dissolution of the ministerial contract.—Powers of the parish in respect to places of worship.—Legal rights of ministers.*

It may be of some practical importance, to introduce into this Appendix the prevalent views in regard to the legal character and rights of churches and parishes. Although the subject can be stated only in brief, the peace and stability of our religious institutions seems to require, that its outlines at least should be understood.

I. And, in the first place, it is to be observed, that CHURCHES are bodies corporate, although perhaps, in some parts of the country at least, existing without a formal act of incorporation by the legislature. Such an act is not necessary to their existence as corporations. Bodies may become corporate by mere prescription, and without an express act of incorporation, and they are often recognized as such by the Supreme authority. Many towns have become corporations in this way.\* Churches, therefore, having become corporations either by legislative enactment, or by common law, may maintain a perpet-

\* There are a number of enactments by the legislature of Massachusetts, which, either directly or indirectly, authorize or acknowledge the existence of churches as corporations. Acts, passed in the years 1841 and 1860, give liberty, (which by the way, they would have possessed, if it had not been given,) to religious persons, to form themselves into a church state, to choose officers, to admit or expel members, &c. By a law of 1786, churches are expressly constituted corporations, with power to receive donations, and with other powers. And without doubt similar enactments may be found in the legislative records of other States.

ual succession; and possess certain rights, which they can legally defend in their united or corporate capacity. The members of a church are generally inhabitants of the parish; but membership in a parish is not absolutely essential to membership in the church, nor, on the other hand, does membership in a church necessarily imply membership in a parish. They are, in most respects, distinct corporate bodies, although in general existing and acting together, and forming for certain purposes a sort of combined corporation. And this view is not only agreeable to the established Order of these churches; but has been sanctioned by legal decision. *Mass. Reports, Burr vs. the First Parish in Sandwich.*

II. And agreeably to these views, churches may hold property for themselves, and independently of the Parish, with which they are connected, such as baptismal fonts, furniture for the Lord's supper, property designed for the assistance of the poor and suffering members, and also property designed for the support of a minister. As churches are to be considered corporations for these purposes in particular among others, viz. to baptize, administer the Lord's supper, assist the poor, and maintain the preaching of the Word, the objects, for which they exist as distinct and authorized bodies, would, in a great measure fail, unless they were permitted to hold property of the kind, and for the ends above stated. (*See Mass. Rep. Baker et al. vs. Fales.*)

III. It would seem to follow, therefore, from what has been said, that the connection, existing between the church and parish is a mere matter of agreement. And hence, being distinct corporations except so far as they reciprocally agree in an unity of interests and objects, they may separate from each other, whenever they please, although they have previously acted together for certain common purposes. And, therefore, it would seem to be reasonable and just, that a church, separating from its parish in a body, (that is to say, a majority of them separating by proceeding and voting in the usual way,) should hold the property, which had previously been in its possession, unless it appear to have been given to the church on the condition, or implied condition, of its remaining in a particular place, or sustaining a relation to

a particular parish. But generally property cannot be supposed to have been given in this way, inasmuch as churches often find it necessary to separate from parishes, and since it is undoubtedly their duty so to do, whenever any important ecclesiastical rights, the acknowledgement of which was understood to be the basis of their union, are invaded. The property, therefore, ought in right to go with the body, (that is, with the majority of the church) except it be detained from it in consequence of such conditions as above alluded to.

It is well known, that a decision of a different tendency, (*Baker et al. vs. Fales,*) has been given in the Supreme Court of Massachusetts. It has been there decided, that in case of a schism in a church, (the minority remaining and the majority seceding, and going off from the parish,) the body left behind constitutes the original church, and holds the property. It is true, that the opinion there expressed, which implies, that a church is not a moveable body, but necessarily a sort of fixture or appendage of the parish, is not accordant with the spirit, at least, of the decision in the case of *Burr vs. the inhabitants of the First Parish in Sandwich*; but like all decisions from so high an authority, it has had its weight. Although undoubtedly made without any intentional injustice to the parties concerned, the decision, referred to in the case of *Fales*, has been regarded by the Congregational churches, as an infringement of their rights. Nevertheless, such is their confidence in the principles of our government, and in the wisdom and justice of its administrators, they hope for suitable redress, whenever they shall have taken the pains which is incumbent on them, to make their ecclesiastical organization more distinctly and fully known.

Congregationalists assert, (and certainly it belongs to them to judge,) that churches may exist alone, and without parishes; as is the fact in some colleges and theological institutions at the present time. And where it is otherwise, their whole ecclesiastical history shows that there is no necessary and indissoluble connection between the two, (see §§ 64, 65, of this work;) but, on the contrary, their connection is often dissolved.

Now let us observe the operation of the decision referred to.—A church finds it necessary by a majority, mere-

or less, to dissolve its connection with a particular parish; a few remain behind of their own accord, or the parish may take such measures as to influence and detain a small number. These organize themselves anew, and although they are perhaps not one tenth in number of the original body, take all the property. Without doubt, if property were given to the church on the condition of its remaining with the parish, or if that were the fair understanding from all the circumstances of the case, it would be right for the new church, formed in the parish, to hold it. But if the property were evidently given without such or a similar condition, express or implied, then it is contended by the Congregational churches, that such a disposition of it would be utterly contrary to justice; especially when it is taken, into view, that all religious bodies are themselves the judges, and the only proper judges of their own organization and principles of proceeding.

IV. We pass from the consideration of the legal powers and rights of churches *to those of parishes*.—Parishes, as well as churches, are corporate bodies, being constituted such, either by statute or usage. The rights and powers of parishes are limited by the objects, for which they are incorporated, and therefore are few. They may join with the church in electing and supporting a minister; they may erect and repair houses of public worship; they may hold parsonages and other property for the support of the ministry. But it would seem both from usage, and from the legal decisions, which have been given on the subject, that they have no authority to grant monies, except for settling and supporting ministers, for building houses of public worship, and for the charges arising from, and necessarily connected with these objects.—*Mass. Reports, Milford vs. Godfrey et al. 1. Pick.*

The Usage of Congregationalists, granting the church the privilege of taking the lead in the settlement of a minister, and giving to the parish merely the power of concurring or non-concurring, has been recognized in legal decisions.—“The parish, when the ministerial office is vacant, from an ancient and respectable usage, wait until the church have made choice of a minister, and have requested the concurrence of the parish, and if the parish do not concur, the election of the church is a nullity; and if

The parish do concur, then a contract of settlement is made wholly between the parish and minister, and is obligatory on them only." *Mass. Reports, Burr vs. the inhabitants of First parish in Sandwich*, vol. ix. p. 277.

V. It is common, and in all cases is desirable, that the contract should be written and explicit, so that each party may know, when it has been violated. It is not according to the usage of the churches for either the minister or the parish to assume the responsibility of judging for themselves, whether the contract has been violated or not. That is a subject to be determined by a Council of neighboring churches; but as parishes approach nearer the character of civil, than of ecclesiastical corporations, it is not customary for the parish to call the Council, nor for the churches sent to to regard such an invitation. The parish make known their wishes to the church, and the church call the Council; and such is the intimate connection existing between the church and parish, in relation to the pastor, that a refusal of the church to comply with the request of the parish, under such circumstances, would, in ordinary cases, be a just ground of complaint. So that, while the parish have a negative on the church in the settlement of a minister, the church have a negative on the parish in his dismissal; sometimes a direct negative, but more frequently it is exercised through the medium of a Council.

A church may also take the first steps towards dismissing a minister. If he be immoral, or neglect his pastoral duties, or fail in other respects as a minister, they may think it best not to wait for any steps towards a removal on the part of the parish. If the church, in view of the minister's misconduct, call a Council, and the Council decide, he has forfeited his ministerial character, or that his connexion with the church as a minister shall be dissolved, it releases the parish from all pecuniary obligation, although they do not take any measures themselves. This is reasonable, because the vote of the parish in the settlement at first was only a concurrence with that of the church; the judgment and choice of the church were, according to Congregational Order, necessarily antecedent to the proceedings of the parish, and of course virtually formed a condition of the engagements entered

into by the parish. This condition being removed, and he being no longer pastor of the church, his relation as minister to the parish ceases at the same time, and the latter are released from their obligations to support him.

Again, if the parish are desirous to release themselves from the ministerial obligation, and are fixed in the opinion, that the minister has violated his contract, either express or implied, and the church, nevertheless, refuse to call a Council after all their solicitations to that effect, they may assume the responsibility of judging for themselves. They may vote, if they please, not to pay him; which will of course bring the subject, if the minister deems it best, before a court and jury, who are considered competent to determine, whether he is immoral, neglects his parochial duties, &c, although the subject would more properly have been submitted to a Council, if it could have been obtained. (*See Dedham Case and Considerations on Congregational Polity, Note C.*)

**VI. REBUILDING PLACES OF WORSHIP.**—It was remarked that the powers of parishes are limited by the objects, for which they are incorporated. They may build houses of worship, but after they are built, the pew-holders, who purchase in them, possess a right, independently of that of the parish. Still the power of the parish remains to a certain extent. By common consent and common practice, each meeting-house pertains to some one parish, and not to another; and it may be taken down by a vote of that parish, and rebuilt on the same place. The form of the edifice at its rebuilding may be altered for the purpose of rendering it more convenient, notwithstanding the owners of pews therein are in consequence deprived of their property in them. This is suitable and right; for the meeting-house, although it is now immediately owned by pew-holders, is held by them on the condition and with the understanding, that it is to be employed for the religious purposes of a particular corporation, viz. THE PARISH. Nevertheless, when the parish destroy and rebuild a meeting-house, they are under obligations to provide an indemnity for the pew-holders on equitable principles. And if this is not done, the parish, it has been decided, is liable to an action for damages. *Mass. Reports,*

vol. xxii. *Gay vs. Baker. Daniel vs. Wood et al.* 1.  
*Pick.*

**VII. LEGAL RIGHTS OF PASTORS.**—By the laws of the land, and by the common law, ministers may not only hold parsonage lands, designed for their support, but may sue and defend in all actions, touching the same. But they cannot alienate such lands for any time longer than their continuance as ministers, unless with the consent of the church or of the parish, as the case may be, which holds them in trust. They possess the property not in their own, but in the right of the church or parish.—*Mass. Reports, Bigelow's Digest*, p. 450.

---

## CONSTITUTION OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF MAINE.

**ARTICLE 1.** This Conference shall be called; The General Conference of Maine.

**ART. 2.** The General Conference shall consist of six delegates from each county Conference, which has twenty or more churches, three ministers and three laymen: and four delegates from each county Conference, which has less than twenty churches, two ministers and two laymen; and also of the officers, delegates to foreign bodies, preachers and committees for the times for which they are chosen, and also of the minister of the place, where the Conference meet.

**ART. 3.** Ordained ministers, who may be present at the meetings of this Body, may be invited to sit as honorary members to take part in the deliberations, but not to vote.

**ART. 4.** The annual meetings of this Conference shall be opened with singing, reading the scriptures, and prayer.

**ART. 5.** The presiding officer shall be a Moderator, chosen by ballot, to continue in office three years.

**ART. 6.** There shall be a Corresponding Secretary, chosen by ballot, who shall hold his office for three years, whose duty it shall be, to conduct the correspondence of the Conference, and also collect information, and, at each meeting, exhibit a report on the state of Religion within the limits of this Conference.

**ART. 7.** A Recording Secretary shall have charge of the Records of the Conference, who shall be elected by ballot, and hold his office for three years.

**ART. 8.** The object of the General Conference shall be, to promote intercourse and harmony among the churches of the State, and produce a more extensive co-operation in every good work.

**ART. 9.** The several county Conferences shall retain their individual right and privileges; and no ecclesiastical power or authority shall ever be assumed by the General Conference, or be delegated to it.

**ART. 10.** This Conference shall meet on the Tuesday before the fourth Wednesday of June, annually, at 11 o'clock, A. M. at the place at which the Maine Missionary Society shall hold their annual meetings.

**ART. 11.** The Conference shall establish its own By-Laws, and regulations subject to alterations at their future meetings.

**ART. 12.** This Conference may interchange friendly correspondence with other religious bodies in the habit of such intercourse.

**ART. 13.** At each meeting of the Conference a first and second preacher shall be appointed by ballot for the next meeting.

**ART. 14.** Any county Conference may withdraw from this connection by assigning to the Recording Secretary their reasons in writing.

**ART. 15.** The funds of the Conference, to be raised by a contribution at each annual meeting, shall be appropriated, after deducting incidental expenses, to the aid of feeble Conferences.

**ART. 16.** The public religious exercises shall be closed by the administration of the Lord's Supper.

**ART. 17.** The Constitution of this Conference may be altered at the annual meetings of this Body, by two thirds of the members present.

END.

The next night  
and over part of the day

Yorn of letter missive 63







1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

UPHAM, Thomas Cogswell

AUTHOR

Ratio disciplinae

TITLE

Call

718

Co

U67r

